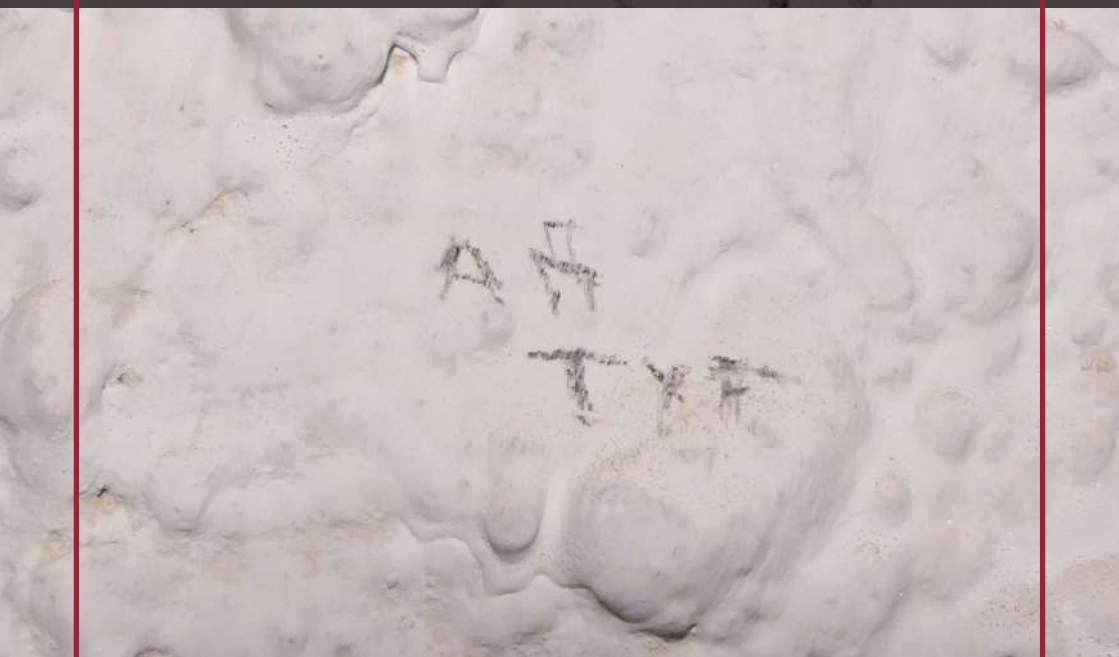


War Crimes of the Russian Army

THE BLACK REGISTER

Cases of Executions, Torture, and Cruel
Treatment of the Civilian Population
in Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine
(24.02.2022 – 31.08.2023)



THE BLACK REGISTER Cases of Executions, Torture, and Cruel Treatment of the Civilian Population in Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine (24.02.2022 – 31.08.2023)

This research serves as an archive of information about cases of executions, torture, and the use of violence against civilians during the Russian occupation of Ukrainian territories. The collected database not only vividly demonstrates the scale of the tragedy for the Ukrainian people but also provides an opportunity to investigate the crimes that the Russian invaders committed against peaceful people in the occupied territories – identify the most common types, motives, and goals of committing these crimes.

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INTRODUCTION

On February 24, 2022, Russia launched a full-scale military invasion with the aim of depriving Ukraine of its sovereignty. The invasion strategy included not only the forcible change of the legitimate government in Kyiv but also the seizure and establishment of control over as many regions of Ukraine as possible. As a result of the concentration of a large number of troops and treacherous attacks, the invaders managed to occupy a significant part of the country in the initial stages. According to the American Institute for the Study of War (ISW) and CNN journalists¹, within a month of the Russian advance, Ukraine lost approximately 119,000 square kilometers of its territory, which is about one-fifth of its total area. The residents of 3,620 settlements in the Donetsk, Zhytomyr, Zaporizhia, Kyiv, Luhansk, Mykolaiv, Odesa, Sumy, Kharkiv, Kherson, and Chernihiv regions have fallen into occupation². Exact figures regarding the number of people who were under the control of Russian forces are currently impossible to determine, but the Minister for Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories of Ukraine, Iryna Vereshchuk, announced that as of September 2022, 1-1.2 million Ukrainians were under occupation³.

By withstanding the enemy's pressure through active defense, the Armed Forces of Ukraine turned the situation around on the front lines in the spring and transitioned to a counteroffensive. According to the Commander-in-Chief of the Ukrainian army, Valeriy Zaluzhny, during the offensive operation in 2022, 40% of the territory occupied after February 24 was liberated⁴.

Ukraine's military successes not only debunked the myth of the «*invincibility of the world's second army*» but also shattered the narrative propagated by Russian propagandists about the «*humanity and compassion*» of their military personnel. In areas abandoned by Russian forces, numerous testimonies of horrific war crimes committed against civilians

were discovered. The international community realized that the residents of the Russian-occupied regions had become victims of unprecedented acts of cruelty and violence on a scale not seen in modern Europe.

The Independent International Commission of the United Nations on Investigating Violations in Ukraine, after visiting liberated territories in the Kyiv, Chernihiv, Kharkiv, and Sumy regions, reported to the UN General Assembly on October 18, 2022: «*The Commission has determined that beginning on February 24, 2022, war crimes, human rights violations, and violations of international humanitarian law occurred in Ukraine. The Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (RF) are responsible for the vast majority of documented violations. The Commission has documented cases of extrajudicial executions, illegal deprivation of liberty, torture, cruel treatment, rape, and other forms of sexual violence committed in territories occupied by the Russian Armed Forces*⁵. According to its mandate, the Commission aims to facilitate the identification of those responsible»⁶.

Since the beginning of the war, Ukraine's law enforcement agencies, with the involvement of foreign experts, have actively investigated war crimes committed by Russian military personnel and their accomplices. According to the Office of the Prosecutor General, as of August 27, 2023, 101,959 criminal proceedings have been initiated under Article 438 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine, «*Violation of Laws and Customs of War*»⁷. Furthermore, the National Police of Ukraine reported 72 criminal proceedings related to sexual violence committed by the Russian military and the discovery of 79 torture chambers and detention facilities on the de-occupied territories⁸. The official documentation of such crimes by law enforcement agencies and the identification of individuals involved in the cruel treatment of Ukrainians created the necessary legislative foundation for the just punishment of criminals within the ranks of the Russian army.

In addition, it was critically important to inform the world about the depth of evil that has unfolded on the Ukrainian lands occupied by Russia. The step-by-step advancement of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, which began in March 2022 and continues to this day, has led to a flood of reports on the atrocities committed by the Russian army in the national and global information space. The liberation of new territories from the enemy has sparked a new wave of various publications on this subject, from restrained press releases on the websites of law enforcement agencies to journalistic investigations and interviews with victims and eyewitnesses. The need arose to collect these scattered pieces of information, unify, systematize, and compile them on a single platform. This mission is what «The Black Register» intends to fulfill, serving as a unique archive of information about cases of executions, torture, and the use of violence against civilians during the Russian occupation. The existence of such a database not only vividly demonstrates the scale of the tragedy for the Ukrainian people but also provides an opportunity to investigate the crimes of the Russian invaders (to classify, identify the most common types, motives, etc.).


«The Black Register» is not just a tribute to the sorrow and memory of the victims. It is also a warning to humanity that such atrocities are still possible in the 21st century. This serves as an impetus for a reevaluation and updating of the global policy for responding to any future military aggression.

Finally, it should be noted that information about war crimes committed by Russians, which are related to the abuse of Ukrainian prisoners of war, and cases of civilian casualties resulting from shelling and other combat actions, has not been included in the «The Black Register.» We documented and described one of the most abhorrent types of war crimes – the

killing, rape, and abuse of unarmed civilian individuals who were not directly involved in combat, did not carry weapons, and were under the full and unquestionable control of the occupiers.

This work was done within the project «Documentation of War Crimes Committed by the Russian Federation,» which is funded by the NED (National Endowment for Democracy).

FREERIGHTS
Human Rights Association



Part I
Russian Army:
Predetermined Cruelty

The UN Charter adopted in 1945 prohibited war, emphasizing the inadmissibility of threats or the use of force in international relations, particularly «*against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state*» (Article 2 of the Charter). However, the existence of this principle of international law did not lead to world stability – wars, which came to be called «military conflicts,» periodically arose and were conducted with varying degrees of intensity.

At the same time, scientific and technological progress has significantly expanded warfare tools, replenishing the military's arsenals with high-precision, «intelligent,» and non-lethal weapons. Many states' political and military leadership had the opportunity to choose and implement military doctrines that would lead to less tragic consequences for the civilian population.

However, from the first days of military aggression in Ukraine, it became clear that Russia not only openly and defiantly ignored the legal norms recognized by the international community but also used inhumane and destructive methods of conducting military operations. The world was even more shocked by the ruthless attitude of the occupying forces towards the civilian population in the occupied territories, which in terms of the level of repression and cruelty, reminded humanity of the terrible times of the Second World War. Along with the Nazi swastika, the sign in the form of the letter «Z,» with which the Russians marked their equipment, became a symbol of violence, suffering, and death. Of course, every war is accompanied by manifestations of cruelty. Still, the scale of its use in Ukraine shocked the European community so much that the parliaments of Ukraine, Estonia, Ireland, Canada, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and the Czech Republic recognized Russia's actions as genocide of the Ukrainian people.

It would be a mistake to believe that the numerous war crimes committed by the Russians against the civilian population were a response to the successful resistance to the

invasion by the Armed Forces of Ukraine and that the atrocities of the Russian soldiers were motivated only by the desire to avenge the death of their comrades. Any behavior of military personnel in the occupied territories is formed by a combination of several factors. And after analyzing those factors, we can conclude that the **Russian army's ruthlessness and cruelty in Ukraine were predetermined.**

1. *OBJECTIVES OF WAR*

Any war is the most radical way to achieve political goals. And the legality and humanity of these goals determine the attitude of military personnel toward the civilian population. In other words, in war, the end not only justifies the means but also defines them.

Since the early 2000s, the formation of a «multipolar world order,» which, in the interpretation of the President of the Russian Federation Putin, comes down to establishing Russia's undeniable hegemony in the former Soviet territories and having the West acknowledge this fact, became the main geopolitical idea of the Kremlin. Moscow believes that political, economic, and cultural dominance in the post-Soviet space should restore Russia's status as a superpower and one of the world's leading political forces. However, Ukraine's independent position prevented the realization of this neo-imperial project. The course toward Eurointegration, declared by its leaders and supported by its citizens, became a serious challenge to Putin since it not only thwarted his global plans but also undermined his personal authority while offering an alternative path of development for other countries.

Convinced of the futility of trying to bring Ukraine back under its influence through «soft power,» the Kremlin decided

to solve the problem through military expansion, intending to dismember Ukraine and replace its leadership with a pro-Russian one. As part of this scenario, some of the seized Ukrainian territories were supposed to be incorporated into the Russian Federation, and the puppet government would officially recognize territorial losses on Ukraine's part, publicly renounce any claims against Russia, and institutionally secure the protection of Russian interests in the regions that would remain in Ukraine.

Kremlin embarked on the implementation of this scenario in 2014, starting the war with Ukraine through the annexation of Crimea. It cynically declared the occupation of another state's territory as «*the restoration of historical justice*» and the «*return of ancient Russian lands.*» Simultaneously, Russia stoked separatist sentiments in eastern and southern regions of Ukraine and used saboteurs to fuel the war in Donbas, creating a foothold for the continuation of military campaigns. Listing the wave of outrage from the international community over this blatant violation of international law, Putin pressed «*pause*» but not «*stop.*» «*What's next? Certainly not silence. There's a lot more geopolitics ahead. Practical, applied, and even contact. How else should Russia remain in the sordid peace's borders? We, of course, are for peace. But not the nasty kind. We are for the right one,*» hinted former aide to the President of the Russian Federation, Surkov, who was the ideologist behind the «*Novorossiya*» project and coordinated the activities of the armed separatist groups so-called «*DNR*» and «*LNR.*»⁹.

In July 2021, in the article «*On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians,*» Putin indicated the final place of the Ukrainian nation in the «*multipolar system of interstate relations,*» which he intended to create: «*True sovereignty of Ukraine is only possible in partnership with Russia because we are one nation.*» Published on the official presidential website, the article became a manifesto for fighting against the Ukrainian idea

and was constantly cited by Russian propaganda. It is also compulsory study material in the Russian army¹⁰. «*Judging by everything, Kyiv simply doesn't need Donbas,*» writes Putin, leaving no room for doubt - Russia's armed aggression against its neighboring country is inevitable, as it is the only way for the Kremlin to satisfy its ambitions.

Before the full-scale invasion, Putin was preparing a legal justification that would legitimize the planned change of Ukraine's borders. On February 21, 2022, Russia recognized the sovereignty of the illegal separatist entities - *the «Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (so-called 'DNR' and 'LNR')»* and signed agreements with them on military assistance¹¹. The whole world witnessed a particular slip that explicitly pointed to the Kremlin's true intentions. During a meeting of the Russian Security Council, the head of the Foreign Intelligence Service of Russia, Naryshkin, instead of «*recognizing the independence*» of the pseudo-republics, proposes to «*include them in the Russian Federation.*»¹². By February 23, the leaders of so-called «DNR» and «LNR» officially requested Putin's assistance in «*repelling Ukrainian aggression.*»¹³. This became the formal pretext for the declaration of the so-called «*special military operation.*» On February 24, 2022, Russia invaded 11 regions of Ukraine with an occupying force of over 300,000 troops¹⁴.

In his televised address on the day of the invasion, Putin promised, «*Our plans do not include the occupation of Ukrainian territories,*» thereby confirming, once again, the unprincipled, cynical, and deceitful nature of Moscow's policies. On September 30, 2022, in the Georgievsky Hall of the Kremlin, the Russian president solemnly proclaimed the occupied territories of Zaporizhia, Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kherson regions as «*four new subjects of the Russian Federation*» and signed documents for their accession to Russia¹⁵.

The imperialist goals of the war were no longer hidden. «*Our victory is the elimination of the Ukrainian state. Historically Russian lands of Novorossiya, including Odessa and Mykolaiv,*

should become part of Russia. Russian cities Kyiv and Kharkiv too. The rest of the former Ukrainian regions that do not wish to join Russia can create a separate new state in alliance with Russia,» the final goals of the invasion for Russian soldiers were formulated in the section *«When and how will this war end»* of the brochure *«Combatant's Combat Record of the Special Military Operation.»*¹⁶.

The unlawful appropriation of Ukrainian lands and resources is presented as a preplanned military success and proof of the Russian army's capability. *«We gained new territories. There is no need to hide it, and the Sea of Azov became an internal sea of the Russian Federation. These are significant matters, a substantial result,»* Putin declares at the meeting of the Russian President's Council on Human Rights¹⁷. *«Regarding the geographical coordinates of the special military operation, he mentions not only so-called «DNR» and «LNR» but also Kherson and Zaporizhia regions and several other territories. And this process continues, persistently and consistently,»* openly talked about the aggressor's intentions the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov¹⁸. Kremlin's Press Secretary Peskov¹⁹ and Deputy Head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Galuzin insisted on *«recognizing the new territorial realities»* as one of the conditions for achieving *«comprehensive, fair, and strong peace.»*²⁰ The Ministry of Education and Science of Russia, in its concept of teaching history in higher educational institutions of the Russian Federation, specified the *«Goal of conducting a special military operation — the accession to Russia of the Donetsk People's Republic, Luhansk People's Republic, Zaporizhia, and Kherson regions.»*²¹

The occupation of Ukrainian territories became a reason for the pride of Russian politicians and propagandists, who call Putin the *«gatherer of Russian lands»* and openly call on the army for further conquests.

«We will not stop anywhere. Our territory is not Zaporizhzhia, not Kherson. Our territory is Odesa, Kyiv, Kharkiv. All regions and Ukraine, in general, are our territory»
(Ramzan Kadyrov, head of Chechnya)²².

«I believe we will finish the war when we reach the border with Poland»
(Petr Tolstoy, Deputy Speaker of the Russian Parliament)²³.

«The safest state of Russian borders is within the boundaries of the post-war Union, and that is what we should strive for. The spatial parameters for the successful execution of a special military operation are evident. The optimal border to reach during this special military operation is the 'Kyiv - Odesa' line. The maximum program is the full restoration of the western border of the USSR»
(Volodymyr Konstantinov, Chairman of the Crimean Parliament)²⁴.

«Ukraine is a rather large country. By European standards, it's enormous, indecently enormous. It needs to be reduced, and thank God, we are successfully working on it»
(Margaryta Simonyan, Editor-in-Chief of the «Russia Today» news agency)²⁵.

Contrary to the expectations of the Kremlin's leadership, the partial successes of the Russian army at the beginning of the war did not lead to the overthrow or the escape from the country of the legitimate Ukrainian government. This thwarted Putin's plans to create a Moscow-controlled government that would acknowledge Ukraine's defeat in the war and become a leader of Russia's interests. Furthermore, the war has united Ukrainians like never before and rallied the nation around its leaders and Armed Forces. *As of August 2022, 91% of Ukrainians support the actions of President Volodymyr Zelensky, and 98% believe in victory in the war*²⁶. Faced with the most significant challenge since gaining independence, Ukrainian society has only grown stronger and has firmly committed to its European future. *In July 2023, 83% of Ukraine's population believed that their country should be a member of NATO, and 85% of those surveyed supported Ukraine's accession to the European Union*²⁷.

The unprecedented consolidation of Ukrainian society against the aggressor forced the Kremlin to adjust its rhetoric regarding the war's previously declared goals. *«In our view, a significant part of the Ukrainian people is engulfed in nazism. This has a mass character. I thought there were a few of them, but I definitely couldn't imagine that there were so many,»* explained the reasons on a popular analytical program the chief editor of the «Russia Today» news agency, Simonyan²⁸. The goal of the war was no longer just the alienation of territories and the overthrowing of the legitimate government but also the subjugation of Ukrainians and the eradication from the collective consciousness of the desire to defend freedom and their right to national self-determination. The so-called «denazification» now applies not only to the «*anti-people junta in Kyiv*» but to the entire Ukrainian nation. *«Vladimir Putin has set clear goals – the demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine*²⁹. *Who said that Ukraine will even exist on the world map in two years? Ukrainian identity doesn't exist and never did,»* emphasized

the Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council, and the Chairman of the ruling party «United Russia,» Medvedev³⁰.

The achievement of these blatantly illegal and invasive goals was only possible through illegal and barbaric means. The article «*What should Russia do with Ukraine?*» (published in April 2022 on the website of the Russian state news agency «*RIA NOVOSTI*») explains: «*In matters of denazification, Russia cannot proceed from a liberal approach. Denazification will inevitably become de-Ukrainization. Bandera's elite must be liquidated; its re-education is impossible. And the social 'swamp,' which actively and passively supported it by action or inaction, must suffer the burden of the war and gain the experience as a historical lesson and redemption for its guilt*»³¹.

The statement of the US Ambassador to the UN and other international organizations in Geneva showed that such a plan is not just theoretical considerations³². The statement claimed that the United States of America had reliable information about Russia's preparation of lists of «*identified Ukrainians who will be killed or sent to camps after the military occupation.*» In addition, Russia intends to use «*lethal measures*» as well as «*kidnapping/enforced disappearances, unlawful detention, and torture*» to suppress peaceful dissent against the occupation.

The German «*Bild*,» with reference to the foreign intelligence service, reported on the Russian project to create special camps on the occupied territories of Ukraine for «*sorting out Ukrainians who show implacability.*» According to the article, «*camps for holding pro-Ukrainian activists are already being planned, and lists of those who will be imprisoned in them are being drafted.*»³³

Experts of the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), in their report «*Preliminary Lessons in Conventional Warfare from Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: February – July 2022,*» concluded that even on the eve of the invasion, Russian counterintelligence

compiled lists according to which Ukrainians divided into four categories: those subject to physical liquidation; those who will need to be intimidated; potentially neutral persons who can be persuaded to cooperate; those who are ready to cooperate (potential collaborators). One of the authors of the report claims that RUSI received instructions and documents that indicate that the first category of Ukrainians (subject to physical liquidation) includes not only war veterans but also civilians - participants of pro-Ukrainian protests, representatives of pro-Ukrainian political and civil organizations, culture and art activists, who took a pro-Ukrainian position and advocated for the Ukrainian language³⁴.

The public statements of Russian politicians and top-ranked officials, which openly encouraged military personnel to commit violence and murder, left no doubt about the methods the Russian army shall use to establish a «new order» in Ukraine.

«Two million people must either leave Ukraine or be denazified. That is, to be eliminated»
(Aleksey Zhuravlev, deputy of the State Duma of the Russian Federation)³⁵.

«Ukrainian cities should be erased from the earth so that the distant horizon can be seen so that they understand that it is impossible to even think of shooting in our direction. We should not wait for what will happen tomorrow»
(Ramzan Kadyrov, head of Chechnya)³⁶.

«Denazification is a multi-layered process. In this sense, my opinion is absolutely radical. I believe that even the very concept of 'Ukraine' should not exist in the future. And the concept of 'Ukrainian' should not exist in the future»
(Oleg Matveychev, deputy of the State Duma of the Russian Federation)³⁷.

«Kyiv is the mother of Russian cities. But if it's necessary for there to be ruins left in Kyiv, and our flag on top of those ruins, then we need to come to that»
(Andrii Guruliov, deputy of the State Duma of the Russian Federation)³⁸.

«Destroy Kyiv. Destroy Lviv. We won't save Odesa either - we will rebuild it later. It will be much easier that way»
(Volodymyr Solovyov, host of several television programs and, in 2021, was recognized as Russia's most popular journalist)³⁹.

Historical experience shows that foreign military intervention aims to conquer new territories, force a change of power in the country, and plant an alien worldview is always accompanied by cruelty and violence against the indigenous population. Ukraine could not become and has not become an exception to this rule.

2. **THE IDEOLOGY OF WAR**

For the Russian army, the invasion of Ukraine was not a repetition of the «Crimean scenario» with the promised easy walk of «polite people» to the «brotherly people.» The fierce resistance of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, partisan actions, and the outright negative attitude of civilians demonstrated that Russian soldiers were not considered liberators but occupiers. This required not only pushing out of their minds the previous stereotypes of propaganda but also overcoming universal moral barriers that limit cruelty and prevent the achievement of the aggressive goals of the war. Such barriers were quickly

broken by the purposeful instillation in the Russian army of the ideology of hatred of both the enemy and all Ukrainians.

Soldiers are easier compelled to kill when the necessity of killing is justified with noble intentions. Since there were no legal arguments that reasonably justified the attack on Ukraine, in ideological and educational work with soldiers, illogical and unsubstantiated theses about the necessity of a «*preemptive strike*» and «*defense of the homeland on distant frontiers*» were used to legitimize the war. In the Russian interpretation, Russia did not invade Ukraine but «entered its territory» because the country's leadership received information about the preparation of a «*Ukrainian military operation*» to reclaim the annexed territories of Crimea and Donbas. «*You and I simply had no other option to protect Russia and our people,*» Putin stated in his televised address to Russians on February 24, 2022. «*Russia was forced to conduct a special operation for the sake of defending its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the security of millions of citizens. Our country exercised its right to self-defense,*» explained Dmitry Medvedev, Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council. «*Our main goal is to protect the Russian Federation from the military threat posed by Western countries trying to use the Ukrainian people in the fight against our country,*» motivated the soldiers Russia's Minister of Defense Shoigu⁴⁰.

Contrary to the obvious, servicemen were persuaded that they were not occupiers and killers but saviors of their country, which faced the danger of disintegration and destruction in case of defeat. Narratives like «*Putin literally outpaced the plans of Kyiv and the West, allowing us to seize the strategic initiative*» and «*NATO intended to deploy nuclear weapons on Ukrainian territory and start a war with Russia*»⁴¹ dispelled doubts and feelings of guilt in the army.

Moreover, it is always important for a soldier to know not only what he is fighting for but also who he is fighting for. The

belief that your enemy is a great and ugly force threatening your loved ones justifies any violence in the soldier's mind.

To distort the objective reality and create the corresponding *«image of the enemy»*, Russia used traditional and proven ideological methods: manipulation of anti-fascist discourse - *«Russian soldier frees the world from fascism.»* They drew parallels with the Second World War - *«we have to finish the war that our grandfathers did not finish»*; played on the long-standing fears of Russians about an imminent war with NATO - *«the enemy at the gate»*; speculated on the opposing interests of Russia and the *«collective West»* - the *«battle of civilizations»*; used the legend about the unique mission of the Russians - *«participation in the primordial struggle between good and evil.»*

«We are fighting neo-nazis. Many residents of Ukraine were deceived by nationalist propaganda, and some deliberately followed the path of the Banderites, other nazi



henchmen who fought on Hitler's side during the Great Patriotic War [World War II]»
(Vladimir Putin, President of Russia)⁴².

«The events in Ukraine are not a clash between Moscow and Kyiv. This is NATO and the US military confrontation with Russia»
(Nikolai Patrushev, Secretary of the Security Council of Russia)⁴³.

«This is the war of Heaven against Hell. Angelic hosts against the devil. The battlefield is Ukraine. On the one side, we, Holy Russia. And against us are the forces of absolute world evil»
(Alexander Dugin, Russian philosopher, political scientist, and propagandist)⁴⁴.

Those notions have become a mandatory part of the ideological training of personnel in the Russian army. Distorted by years of propaganda, the consciousness of servicemen was ready to accept irrational and simplistic but conscience-soothing explanations

«The West managed to detach a piece of the Russian World from our country - most of the Ukrainians and raised them in hatred towards us. Their task is to erase Russia from the face of the Earth, dooming the entire world to destruction and extinction. We are fighting for a peaceful and honest future. For the security in our great home - Russia and in every family. Russia's task is to save the world from another fascism, which is not yet defeated. We are the last hope of humanity»
(leaflet «Combatant's Guide of the Special Military Operation»)⁴⁵.

«Ukraine does not exist as a state. There is an occupied territory of the former Ukrainian SSR. Today, Ukraine is taking revenge on Russia for our Great Victory. For us, this is a continuation of the Great Patriotic War [World War II]. And we, like our grandfathers in the forty-fifth year, are obliged to win»

(memo for the conscripts «I live, fight, win,» published in Russia by the «Herald of Military Education»)⁴⁶.

«When communicating with the local population, Ukrainian forces should be referred to as nazis, militants, and invaders. It should also be claimed that we are fighting against NATO»

(instruction for a Russian Armed Forces soldier deployed in the special military operation zone in Ukraine)⁴⁷.

«In Ukraine, there are officially existing fascist organizations. Nazism in Ukraine is supported at the state level»

(leaflet «The Whole Truth About Ukraine's Crimes in Donbas,» prepared for Russian servicemen by the organization «Russian Veterans»)⁴⁸.

«The Western countries are no longer satisfied with Russia's 'honorable capitulation.' Their goal is to plunge our country into chaos and anarchy, destroy statehood, and dismember the country. Western leaders openly talk about dismembering Russia. They are not fighting against our ruling class but against the country itself, against our people. Their aim is to turn us into a resource that they can use to support their declining civilization. By taking back Ukraine, we are wresting from the enemy the last and most dangerous weapon against us»

(guidance for Russian Armed Forces personnel participating in the special military operation)⁴⁹.

«The transformation of Ukraine into «anti-Russia» happened under the pressure of the US, the EU, and NATO. The West recognized the people of Ukraine as related close enough by blood to turn Ukraine into an assault base against Russia. Russia responded to this with a pre-emptive strike»

(methodical recommendations «Russian world against fascism» for teaching classes to Russian military personnel)⁵⁰.

At the same time, the cult of death in war was actively imposed on Russian soldiers because contempt for one's own life inevitably leads to devaluing other people's lives. Public statements by Putin such as «We, as martyrs, will enter paradise, while they will just die»⁵¹ and «One who dies in war at least lived. The purpose of their life is fulfilled»⁵² became key ideograms in the propaganda emphasizing the necessity of waging war to a victorious end, regardless of the losses. The Russian president's statements were further developed by Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia, who assured in his sermons that death on the front lines was «an act equivalent to a sacrifice for others» and such a death «washes away all the sins a person has committed.»⁵³. «The ability to die for higher ideals makes our country invincible,» instructed the faithful in epaulets the chief priest of Russia⁵⁴.



«Today we, Orthodox and Muslims, Buddhists and Shamanists fight on the side of Good in one line against Ukrainian nationalism and the global Satanism behind it. And maybe our president wasn't kidding when he said, 'We as martyrs will go to heaven, and they will just die.' Probably, Putin knows something about which it is not yet time to talk»

(a memo for the conscripts «I live, I fight, I win,» published in Russia by the «Bulletin of Military Education»)⁵⁵.

«We do not die; our souls are immortal! We are defending our people - our mothers, wives, children. And there is no greater valor for a person than to give their life for 'others,' for our Motherland, for liberating the land from the fascist plague. Vladimir Putin said: 'We will enter paradise, and they will just die'»

(brochure «Combatant's Leaflet of the Special Military Operation»)⁵⁶.

One of the most effective ways to remove a person's moral restraints is to encourage them to take revenge, which has become a powerful emotional tool for pushing Russian servicemen to brutality. And since revenge is considered a proportional punishment for the evil caused (*«an eye for an eye»*), the maximum number of negative actions is attributed to the Ukrainian side.

In the methodological guidelines for ideological work and information and propaganda support of the war in Ukraine, prepared by the 5th department of the FSB of Russia, it is indicated:

«One of the problems was that the beginning of the special operation and the concept of 'denazification' were not backed by an emotional background. There was no mass

release of emotionally charged information about the children murdered in the DPR and LPR, about the massacres of Russians by nationalists. There is not enough such information even now, especially firsthand. It is necessary to spread the narratives about the atrocities and crimes of the nationalist battalions as much as possible, with a clear indication of the hatred of the nationalists specifically for the Russians, as for the people, and not only for the state and the army. It is also necessary to organize stories about the massacre of Russian and Ukrainian veterans [of World War II] and their numerous requests to stop fascism in Ukraine»⁵⁷.

The recommendations of the FSB were immediately incorporated into the ideological constructions of the justification for the war. The creation of the idea of the «beastly face» of the Ukrainian military among Russian soldiers has become a mandatory element of educational programs in the Russian army.

«Another version of fascism, this time Ukrainian, has demonstrated its savagery, inhuman nature. The Banderites openly state that they will kill all Russians, regardless of gender, age, or nationality. They have been killing children, women, and the elderly in Donbas for nine years since 2014. They continue to kill unarmed people now, capturing it on their mobile phones. This is how they report to their Western masters. If they are not stopped, they will come to our homes and enjoy killing our loved ones. To prevent this from happening, we must eradicate this plague once and for all»

(brochure «Combatant's Leaflet of the Special Military Operation»)⁵⁸.

«Cruel methods demonstrated today by the Ukrainian army towards the residents of territories not controlled by

it, mass death of children, torture of prisoners and people who sympathize with Russia - all this comes from the practice of Bandera during the Great Patriotic War [World War II]»

(methodical recommendations «Russian world against fascism» for teaching classes to Russian military personnel)⁵⁹.

«Ukrainian soldiers are creating hell for our prisoners of war. Behind the cruelty hides the inferiority and the age-old fear of the Russians»

(memo for the conscripts «I live, fight, win,» published in Russia by the «Bulletin of Military Education»)⁶⁰.

«Ukrainian soldiers torture, kidnap and rape on the territory of the DPR and LPR. In Ukraine, one can be beaten for the Russian language. The authorities of Ukraine consider the residents of the DPR and LPR to be 'bastards'»

(brochure «The whole truth about Ukraine's crimes in Donbas,» prepared for Russian servicemen by the «Veterans of Russia» organization)⁶¹.

But the foundation of the ideological influence on Russian servicemen was the «*demonization*» of the entire Ukrainian people. Russian politicians and state officials understood that calls to soldiers to destroy their «Ukrainian brothers» would cause cognitive dissonance. Therefore Ukrainians should be turned into «*khokhols*» (a derogatory term for Ukrainians used by Russians), «*fascists*,» «*Banderians*,» «*followers of the West*,» and «*servants of Satan*.» Using hate speech, Ukrainians have attributed the most negative human qualities; they were accused of confessing to nazism and intending to destroy Russian statehood together with the «*hostile NATO*.»

«I hate them [Ukrainians]. They are jerks and freaks. They wish us death and death to Russia. And as long as I am alive, I will do everything to make them disappear»
(Dmytro Medvedev, Deputy Chairman of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, Chairman of the ruling United Russia party)⁶².

«Ukraine is the kingdom of lies, corruption, and bribery. Ukrainians are not an ethnic group but a perverted way of thinking. Any scoundrel or embezzler is a spiritual Ukrainian. Ukrainian is the bastard who lent his language to Satan. A Ukrainian journalist or a politician of any party in any country, a scum - this is Ukrainian!»
(Archpriest Andrii Tkachev)⁶³.

«We are fighting the Nazis. I believe there should be no mercy for them. In such a situation, the lines from Simonov's poem are the most appropriate: 'Kill at least one! Kill as soon as possible! How many times you see him - that's how many times you kill him!'. Work, brothers!»
(Aleksandr Kibovskyi, head of the Department of Culture of the Government of Moscow)⁶⁴.

«No mercy for the Ukrainian civilians!»
(Mykhailo Ulyanov, permanent representative of the Russian Federation at international organizations in Vienna)⁶⁵.

The goal of such appeals was clear: to show the victim as the oppressor, to instill false ideas about the essence of war in Russian soldiers, and to encourage them to brutality as a necessary means of achieving victory.

«Not long ago, 96.7% of Ukrainians were Russians. But 30 years of independence turned them into wild Russophobes. Someday, after denazification, they will become Russians again, but for now, they are enemies. Cruel and insidious. The West has been preparing Ukraine for war with Russia for 30 years. Realizing that we cannot be defeated in a fair fight, they chose the vilest strategy following the example of the Hitlerites»

(a memo for the conscripts «I live, fight, win» published in Russia by the «Bulletin of Military Education»)⁶⁶.

«After the Great Patriotic War [World War II], tens of thousands of Banderites remained in Western Ukraine. Those who collaborated with the fascists, who shot children and women, who burned down Khatyn and hundreds of other villages. And these murderers and sadists began to infiltrate the government and the education system in Ukraine. They have raised their successors, and it is with their descendants that we are fighting today. Just as a surgeon removes cancer cells to save the entire organism, so must a Russian army soldier stop the bloody path of Bandera's admirers by sending them to meet their idol»

(brochure «Combatant's Leaflet of the Special Military Operation»)⁶⁷.

The ideological instructions aimed to strengthen the feeling of impunity for what has been done. In the first reading, the State Duma of Russia adopted a bill that abolishes criminal liability for crimes committed in the occupied territories of Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Luhansk, and Kherson regions if such crimes were *«aimed at protecting the interests»* of the Russian Federation⁶⁸. With the aim of demoralizing the enemy, the Kremlin gave the green light for lawlessness against the civilian population in the occupied territories.

In the occupying army, murder turned from a crime into a tool for «*solving the problem,*» and the value of human life was not more than that of an animal. In the recommendations on the communication with the Ukrainian civilians, Russian servicemen were advised: «*Concerning domestic dogs, marauders, representatives of the territorial defense, it should be said, 'the problem was solved' instead of 'shot,' 'liquidated,' 'killed.'*»⁶⁹.



A significant part of Russian soldiers got rid of their «conscience» and believed that humanitarian law did not apply to the territory of Ukraine and that compliance with the laws and customs of war was not mandatory.

From intercepted telephone conversations of Russian servicemen with relatives and friends:

«*Darling, they are just khokhols; they are just junk, just dust. Forget about this nation. It will never exist again. There is very little left - it will be wiped off the face of the earth. They themselves are to blame. I hope they will die as quickly as possible. And their children. I don't give a damn about their children. A khokhol child? It should be killed before even being born. Therefore, I will make it happen. I do it already. OK, bye. Kiss you.*»⁷⁰

«*Mother, we have to kill everyone: both children and women. All of them. The entire Ukraine must be destroyed all the way to Lviv. So that this country is not on the map anymore. It is necessary to erase them off the face of the*

earth. There will be a fight - I will do what I planned to do. I shoot them all. As many as I can. I will carve a swastika on their forehead with my knife. I will personally carve it.»⁷¹

«Nastya, I don't want to tell you that I shoot civilians, murder them, break their knees. Nastya, I have become a monster, a complete goof. When there were civilians, I threw civilians into the trenches and shot them in the head. They cried, and begged me, but I shot them anyway. I put these khokhols on their knees and forced them to say, «Russia forever.» I have never lied to you, and I will never lie to you, Nastya.»⁷²

«There are no khokhols here anymore. Niggers, Arabs, French, Canadians, Finns, Americans. All of Europe. Do you want me to bring you a nigger's ear, mother?»⁷³

3.

THE STRUCTURE AND PRINCIPLES OF FORMING AN OCCUPATION CONTINGENT

The investigation of war crimes committed by the Russians in the occupied territories showed that not only professional servicemen of the Russian Armed Forces were involved in the inhumane treatment of the civilian population. In many cases, the murders and torture of civilians were committed by persons who previously had nothing to do with the official armed forces.

In February 2013, the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, Valery Gerasimov, formulated and supplemented the Russian military doctrine with the concept of «*hybrid war*,» which, in particular, provided for the

active interaction of regular army units with irregular armed formations - volunteer units, private military companies, sabotage groups, units of collaborators, etc. In 2014, Russians successfully tested this tactic when they seized Crimea and separate regions of Donbas. During a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Kremlin applied similar tactics, using a hybrid combination of regular forces and irregular units to carry out the intervention. And since the alienation of territories and the replacement of the leadership of Ukraine by the power of collaborators required the performance of not only military but also punitive and police tasks, units of the Russian Guard, special police units, and employees of the FSB of Russia were additionally involved in the occupation.

Thus, the occupation contingent was not a monolithic collective of military personnel but an artificially created community of armed people with different military skills, combat experience, motivation, attitude to discipline, and ideas about military ethics. The transition of the war into a long-term phase, the high intensity of hostilities, and the growing losses at the frontline required the rapid replenishment of the army's regular and irregular components. It was difficult to restore human resources solely by recruiting contract servicemen - due to the risks of being killed or wounded in the war, contract service lost popularity among Russians. In turn, sending conscript soldiers to the front could spread anti-war sentiments within Russia and decrease public support for the so-called «*special military operation*.»

In order to prevent a crisis, the Russian authorities were carrying out an unprecedented military recruitment campaign in several stages: separatist groups of the so-called «*people's militia of the DPR and LPR*» were increasing by means of mass mobilization; in different regions of the Russian Federation numerous volunteer battalions were created and sent to the frontline; comprehensive support is provided to the strengthening of private military companies and paramilitary groups;

«institutions of Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia» staffed by local collaborators were formed and began to operate in the occupied territories.

However, the measures taken did not meet expectations - the war demanded even greater sacrifices. Thus, in September 2022, the Russian Federation announced «partial» mobilization. For Russia's outdated conscription system, the need to quickly send a large number of people to the frontline has become another problem that the military commissariats solved in the usual way - by lowering the quality requirements for the people selected for the army. Faced with the shortage of reservists, the military leadership is betting on recruiting people from the poorest and the most marginalized groups of the population. The occupation contingent is mainly replenished with propaganda-incited supporters of the «Russian world» and representatives of the bottom of society - criminals, extremists, the unemployed, adventurers, and those who simply want to improve their financial situation at the expense of the war. Men who lived in the midst of violence got used to violence, committed violence, and perceived it as the norm, were going to Ukraine with weapons.

3.1. «PEOPLE'S MILITIA» OF ORDLO

Illegal paramilitary formations in the territory of separate districts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions (ORDLO), which Russian propagandists named «*people's militia of the L/DPR*» since 2014, were the primary tool of Russia's military aggression during the first stage of the war in eastern Ukraine. Although the Kremlin denied its direct involvement in supporting the «*people's militias,*» the separatists themselves repeatedly admitted and even boasted that they received supplies from Russia, received training there, had thousands of Russian citizens in their ranks, and acted under the direct command of Russian army officers. The complete dependence of the

separatist formations on the political will of Russia is also confirmed by the conclusions of the Netherlands court in the MH17 case⁷⁴, during the investigation of which numerous pieces of evidence were obtained that the Russian Federation, in general, exercised control over the so-called «DPR» and «LPR». It should be noted that during 2014-2022, the so-called «international brigades,» formed with representatives of both ultra-right and ultra-left radical organizations from abroad, fought on the side of the «people's militia» of ORDLO against Ukrainians. United by the common idea of hatred for the «collective West» and Ukraine's pro-Western orientation, they significantly influenced the general ideological climate and behavior of the separatist fighters. «Residents of territories under the control of armed groups are particularly vulnerable to human rights abuses (...) they live in an environment characterized by the growth of parallel governance structures, a complete absence of the rule of law, reports of arbitrary detention, torture and incommunicado detention, and no access to real redress mechanisms,» the UN OHCHR report in March 2016 indicated.⁷⁵

On February 19, 2022, 5 days before the beginning of the full-scale invasion of Russian troops of Ukraine, the leaders of the self-proclaimed «DPR» and «LPR» announced a general mobilization in the territories controlled by their authorities and cynically called on «*all those capable of holding weapons*» to stand «*in defense of all Russian people*»⁷⁶. Despite the fact that Article 51 of the Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War prohibits the forced mobilization of residents of the occupied territories into military service, the mobilization processes have taken unprecedentedly violent forms in Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The «hunt» was on for men of conscription age at the place of residence, at workplaces, in educational institutions, in public places, and right on the streets; they were then detained and sent to the units of the «people's militia of the DPR and LPR».⁷⁷ According

to the «Eastern Human Rights Group,» more than 140,000 people were mobilized from the ORDLO in this way.⁷⁸



«Now you can go out for bread and end up near Mariupol,» a resident of Donetsk told reporters. *«Our city turned into the city of woman,»* added another resident⁷⁹. The moral qualities of the new recruits, their criminal past, or the state of their mental health were not taken into account. *«They rounded up everyone indiscriminately. From basements, from various cafes, simply at the markets, whether you went out to get some bread or take out the trash. They took people without documents, without anything, silently put them into the cars, and that's it. They took everyone indiscriminately - homeless, crooked, cross-eyed, hunchbacked. Nobody went through a medical examination. If you had hands and legs, you were sent to the front,»* complained the conscript who surrendered in captivity⁸⁰.

Despite the fact that the mobilization was carried out under the slogan «defense of the home and Donbas,» conscripts were sent to participate in joint military operations for the occupation of Zaporizhzhia, Mykolaiv, Sumy, and Kharkiv regions of Ukraine. Even pro-Russian military reporters indicated the unsatisfactory discipline and «low moral and psychological level» of the soldiers of the «people's militia.» Forcefully removed from peaceful life, people who had been under the influence of Russian propaganda for eight years blamed Ukraine and its people for their problems. Hatred towards Ukrainians and everything Ukrainian was constantly fueled by the radical statements of the separatist leaders, who openly called for violence and murder:

«We will defeat everyone. We will kill everyone. We will rob everyone we need! Everything will be as we like!» - Maksym Fomin (Vladlen Tatarskyi), one of the ideologues of separatism and a military commander, declared in his video message from the Georgiyevskiy Hall of the Kremlin⁸¹.

«If you [Ukrainians] don't want us to convince you, we will kill you. We will kill as many of you as will be needed. We will kill a million, five million, or even kill you all,» Pavlo Gubarev, the former «people's governor» of the Donetsk region, head of the mobilization department of the Ministry of Defense of the DPR, said in an interview⁸².

«We will burn your houses, kill your families, take away your children, and raise them as Russians»⁸³, threatened the commander of the «LPR» military unit and propagandist Ihor Mangushev. He was known for his performance on the nightclub stage with allegedly a skull of a Ukrainian soldier in his hand and with the words *«All bearers of the Ukrainian idea must be destroyed.»⁸⁴*

The notion *«You were silent for eight years when they bombed Donbas,»* which was popularized by Russian propagandists through the media, incited separatist fighters to

revenge and was used as a justification for using violence against peaceful citizens. In their testimonies, residents of the occupied territories recollect with horror the brutality of the «people's militia»:

«On the morning of March 4, the [so-called] 'LNR' militia' came to Oleksandr V.'s house in Liptsi, Kharkiv region, on three armored personnel carriers. They took the man outside, put him face down in the snow, and started beating him. While Alexander was lying on the ground, the soldiers took everything out of the house. His wife didn't pay any attention to it, as she was listening to the thud sounds of her husband being beaten.»⁸⁵

«They were mostly beaten with stun guns and rubber batons. They called those batons 'rubber polygraph.' Well, probably because the abbreviation (in Ukrainian) for rubber batons is 'PG,' Yevhen, a Balaklia, Kharkiv region resident, told reporters. - They beat hard. They held me for 12 days in a captured local police station. While I was there, no one died, but some of those beaten in this police station died at home after 2-3 days. The station was mostly staffed by people mobilized from [so-called] 'L/DNR.' In the building, there are bottles of vodka left with marks 'made in the 'LPR.'»⁸⁶

«When I opened the door, he immediately punched me in the face. He knocked out two of my teeth and broke my nose. I was covered in blood. He started hitting me in the chest and head with the butt of the machine gun. I didn't understand what I did wrong. He grabbed me by the hair, threw me on the couch, and started choking me. After that, I could not swallow water for two weeks. He took off my clothes and raped me. And he also cut my stomach - I still have scars,» Ludmyla, a resident of the Myrolyubivka

village of the Kherson region, recalled the horrifying story. The rapist then threatened that if she told about the rape, he would come back and kill her. Lyudmyla indicates that the rapist was a separatist⁸⁷.

On December 31, 2022, the illegal formations of the «people's militia of the L/DNR» officially joined the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation as separate army units. As a symbol of recognition of their services to Russia, the commanders received battle flags personally from Vladimir Putin.

3.2. VOLUNTEER BATTALIONS

In the spring of 2022, efforts started in Russia to create and send to the war against Ukraine «named» volunteer battalions, which were formed on a territorial basis. The Kremlin publicly approved and controlled the process: presidential press secretary Dmitri Peskov called the battalions «*an initiative that deserves the highest praise.*» For the regional authorities,



recruiting as many fighters as possible was the best way to demonstrate their loyalty to Moscow. And as of August 2022, there were at least 52 battalions in 33 subjects of the Russian Federation established⁸⁸.

The main motivation for the service was the profit - volunteers were promised a deferment of loan payments and the accrual of financial support in a double amount (both from the federal and local budgets). The amount of compensation had to be indicated in the advertisement about recruitment to the battalions. Usually, it is \$53 per day plus an additional eight thousand rubles (approx. \$97) for each day in the zone of active hostilities. In addition, a one-time monetary reward of 150 to 300 thousand rubles (approx. \$1800 - 3600) is promised, depending on the region⁸⁹. In November 2022, volunteers were legislatively granted tax and utility benefits, credit holidays, priority medical services, access to sanatorium-resort services, and other measures of social protection⁹⁰. The possibility of easy earnings during the war was actively promoted in the media and social networks, and joining a volunteer battalion was advertised as a way to increase one's social status instantly.

«How to feed the family? How to buy your son a bicycle? How to pay housing debts? Hoping for success and waiting for things to change someday? All this is unreliable. But Sasha was able to break out of the vicious circle and change his life. He took fate into his own hands and signed up as a volunteer. Now he has a salary that he never dreamed of, a new profession, new friends, career growth, and benefits from the state. And additionally, the status of a combat veteran. And therefore respect - he is a real man. Well done! Be like Sasha - sign up as a volunteer and change your life for the better!» - this is how men were encouraged to participate in aggression against Ukraine in the video⁹¹.

Recruitment of volunteers is the most successful in depressed regions of Russia with significant unemployment

and crime rates. The statistics of combat losses indicated - the highest number of casualties was observed in 10 regions of the Russian Federation where budget expenditures per capita are below the national average. People who not only share the Kremlin's anti-Ukrainian ideological stereotypes but also have issues with the police or consider a war of aggression in a foreign country to be an acceptable way to solve their financial problems are enlisting.

«My main motivation for participating in the war is to remove supervision so that I can live peacefully afterward. Every third volunteer is a former convict under probation or with a criminal record,» explained a volunteer of the «Akhmat» battalion volunteer. He was assured that *«any problem with the state can be solved»* and the authorities could expunge his criminal record for participating in the war⁹².

«In Russia, the entire country is now in debt. The population is impoverished; everyone has a dozen of loans. People take one loan to pay off another. People have no money, they have to feed their families somehow, they have to live somehow, they have to pay the utility bill,» - a captured military serviceman who was sentenced to 11 years in prison for torturing people in the occupied Kharkiv region explained his motivation to fight in Ukraine⁹³.

Research conducted in the United States showed that those who voluntarily joined the army were more prone to committing violent crimes than those who were conscripted. This pattern was confirmed in Russia as well. Even during the volunteers' stay in Russia, it became clear that moral principles did not burden this category of people; they had no respect for the law and were ready to use violence both for seeking their own personal gain and just for fun:

«The village of Mulino in the Nizhny Novgorod region is known as a training center for volunteers to be sent to Ukraine. According to local residents, they became afraid to go out after

dark: soldiers drink, brawl, provoke fights, and molest girls. *«Their behavior is disgusting. And these people will defend Russia?! People recruited by advertisement? They have been drinking and lying drunk on the street since the very morning and every day!»* a local resident said resentfully⁹⁴.

The Russian TV channel NTV appealed to the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation with a complaint that in the occupied city of Melitopol, Zaporizhzhia Region, fighters of the Akhmat Battalion raped the channel's reporter Olga Z. and brutally beat her cameraman Artem Ye. when they were on a business trip and were supposed to cover the «liberation mission» of Russia. The document stated that the victims complained to the military prosecutor's office and the police, but they were denied the launch of criminal investigation and the clarification of the circumstances of the crime.⁹⁵

«In the village of Pidhorensk in the Voronezh region, a volunteer and his companion entered a local café, where they got into an argument with other patrons. The conflict escalated in the courtyard and quickly turned into a mass brawl, during which the soldier obtained a grenade and threw it at civilians. As a result of the explosion, one person was injured, and two cars were damaged»⁹⁶.

Evidently, Russian volunteers, who demonstrate criminal behavior towards their own citizens, will not restrain their criminal habits in their treatment of the residents of the country they occupy.

«Now we will not go to the city. In short, the woman was raped there. They say either the deserters or volunteers did it» (interception of a telephone conversation of a Russian serviceman who was stationed near the city of Bakhmut in the Donetsk region)⁹⁷.

Seven soldiers of the «Akhmat-Neftepolk» detachment broke into the home of a resident of the village of Makiivka, Luhansk region, under the pretext of «clearing» the settlement. The perpetrators stole household appliances and money from the victim's apartment, and the woman was tied up and taken to the premises of the village gymnasium. There they demanded «confessions» from her in her activities for the benefit of Ukrainian troops. The victim was electrocuted and beaten with a metal-plastic pipe. Then she was handcuffed to the battery for several hours⁹⁸.

Chechen units were identified as the perpetrators of some crimes in Bucha, where they terrorized the peaceful Ukrainian population from the moment they entered the city⁹⁹.

3.3. PRIVATE MILITARY COMPANIES

To enhance the combat readiness of the invading army, the Russian government strengthened its regular forces with paramilitary formations, whose fighters, unlike most contract soldiers, already had experience in combat in Ukraine. Despite the legal prohibition of mercenaries (Article 359 of the Russian Criminal Code), private military companies (PMCs) such as «Wagner,» «Redut,» «Patriot,» and others were involved in the war on the side of Russia. The illegality of their involvement in the war was undeniable, as there are no legal grounds for the existence of such armed structures in the Russian Federation. *«We don't have a law on private military organizations. The 'Wagner' group exists, but legally it doesn't exist,»* Putin admitted during a meeting with the media¹⁰⁰. Nevertheless, mercenaries from private companies have become a real force in the total war against Ukraine, providing yet another piece of evidence of the Kremlin's flagrant disregard for international law.

As early as March 2022, the first announcements about the recruitment of mercenaries for the most famous PMC «Wagner,» which was called the «Prygozhin Army» (in honor of the businessman Yevgeny Prigozhin, its founder and leader), appeared on the Russian social network «Vkontakte.» Later on, the activities of private military companies were widely advertised, and joining them was presented to Russians as a financially profitable way to participate in the war against Ukraine. Only in March-July 2022, at least 568 such ads were placed in «Vkontakte,» and they were viewed 13.7 million times in total. 13.5 million of those views were attributed to ads of PMC «Wagner.»¹⁰¹



The company is a paramilitary community isolated from external influence, with its own code of honor, internal rules of conduct, and different from conventional ideas about the customs of war. Experts associate the activities of the private military company «Wagner» with several countries, including Sudan, Libya, the Central African Republic, Mozambique, Mali, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, and Chad, where mercenaries were used not only for security functions but also as an additional force to bolster weak armed forces¹⁰². Even before the war in Ukraine, PMC «Wagner» gained a sinister reputation

worldwide - «Wagner» members demonstrated exceptional cruelty in Syria and the Central African Republic. One of the UN reports lists at least a hundred victims of international humanitarian law violations committed by mercenaries in the CAR in January-April 2021. These violations include 26 extrajudicial executions, five rapes, as well as 27 cases of arbitrary arrests and deprivation of liberty. «Many civilians were killed or wounded (...), although they were not legitimate military targets,» the report's authors point out¹⁰³. Due to its involvement in mass executions, rapes, child abductions, and physical abuse of citizens in the Central African Republic and Mali, the United States recognized PMC «Wagner» as a transnational criminal organization and imposed sanctions against it¹⁰⁴.

Despite this, the political leadership of Russia approved the participation of mercenaries in the occupation of Ukraine and supported the activities of the PMC in every possible way. In the summer of 2022, Yevgeny Prigozhin began mass recruitment for the company directly in prisons, multiplying the number of «Wagner» members at the expense of criminals promised amnesty after six months of combat. Those who refused to go to the front were threatened with new criminal cases and repeated terms of imprisonment¹⁰⁵. The owner of the PMC «Wagner,» announced his requirements for the «ideal candidate» for the war in Ukraine: «*It is desirable that they served 15 years or more. Or they had 15 years or more ahead. It is desirable that they were imprisoned more than once for murder, grievous bodily harm, robbery, or burglary. We were and remain a paramilitary organized criminal group with tanks and planes.*»¹⁰⁶

«*I need your criminal talents to kill in the war,*» Yevgeny Prigozhin declared,¹⁰⁷ and his call was heard. Instead of isolation, criminals recognized by the court as being dangerous to society received weapons and were sent to kill in a foreign country. The most willing to become mercenaries were those sentenced to significant terms of imprisonment for

committing violent crimes, including murder. Shocking information appeared in the media about persons sent to fight in Ukraine as part of the PMC «Wagner.»

«Mykhail K. was sentenced to 15 years in prison in 2016 for tying up an acquaintance and raping him with an object. The victim was injured in the abdomen and small pelvis, which resulted in death»¹⁰⁸.

«Aleksandr T. was sentenced to 23 years in prison in 2021 for ordering the murder of a family of four, including two children»¹⁰⁹.

«Roman L. was sentenced to 17 years in prison in 2014 for killing his mother and sister and then burning their bodies»¹¹⁰.

It is impossible to establish the exact number of criminals released from penitentiary institutions to participate in hostilities against Ukraine, as the Russian Federal Penitentiary Service kept this data confidential. The «Rus Sydiacha» foundation, which protects prisoners' rights and has its own sources of information in places of detention and incarceration, believes that more than 40,000 convicts joined the «Prigozhin army.»¹¹¹ The US National Security Council spokesman, John Kirby, estimates approximately the same figure. According to British intelligence, by the end of 2022, the number of the PMC «Wagner» had increased to 50,000 people, which could be up to a quarter of all Russian soldiers who took part in the occupation of Ukraine at that time. Later, Prigozhin himself claimed that only during the battles for the city of Bakhmut in the Donetsk region, he transported and sent 50,000 criminals from prisons to Ukraine¹¹².

The free access of recruiters to prisons, the simplicity of the procedure for recruiting mercenaries, and the scale and speed of sending prisoners to the frontline indicated that the President of Russia sanctioned the participation of Russian criminals in the war against Ukraine. In 2022, the official Kremlin continued to conceal the involvement of the PMC «Wagner» in the occupation of a neighboring country. Still, over time it became impossible to hide the mass death of mercenaries in the war. On January 13, 2023, the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation officially admitted that the assault on the city of Soledar was carried out by «Wagner» members¹⁷³. «*The prisoners fight better than the Guard units,*» Yevgeny Prigozhin declared.

Discipline at the PMC «Wagner» is maintained by demonstrative extrajudicial executions of violators by its own security service. Former «Wagner» member Andrey Medvedev said that he is reliably aware of 10 cases of extrajudicial executions of deserters and prisoners; in two cases, he was personally present at the executions¹⁷⁴. According to human rights defenders, at least 40 «Wagner» members were executed for disobeying orders¹⁷⁵. In November 2022, the video published by the «Wagner» members dispelled all doubts about the company's existing procedures. The video showed the execution by mercenaries with a sledgehammer blow to the head of Yevgeny Nuzhin, a former prisoner recruited by the PMC «Wagner,» for surrendering¹⁷⁶. Despite the total illegality of such actions, the Russian law enforcement system did not react to them, and the press secretary of Russian President Dmytro Peskov refused to comment on the execution, saying, «*It is not our business.*»¹⁷⁷. The Kremlin's reaction once again proved that the law ends where Russia's interests begin.

In the PMC «Wagner,» where there was already an atmosphere of disdain for the rules of the law, with the infusion of criminals, brutality and the devaluation of human life became even more promoted. The unit operated with openly criminal

practices; soldiers were guided by not official regulations but «criminal concepts.» A video shot by the «Wagner» members themselves, showed the punishment of six of their fellow servicemen - they were forced to drink and pour urine on themselves, after which they were imprisoned in a special pit¹¹⁸.

Armband chevrons became popular among mercenaries with the inscriptions «*I believe in nothing, I'm just here for violence*» and «*Our business is death, and business is going well,*»¹¹⁹, which proclaimed the foundations of the mercenaries' ideology and demonstrated their attitude towards Ukrainians.

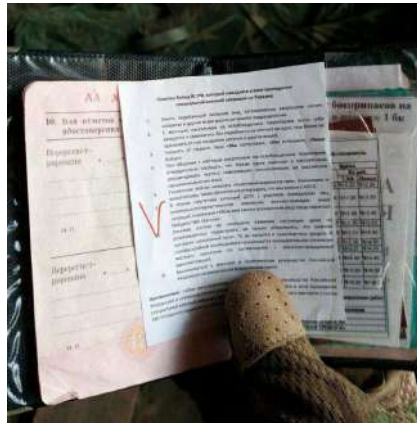
Germany's foreign intelligence service received information about atrocities committed by the Russian military - the telephone conversations of Russian soldiers in the region north of Kyiv were intercepted. Intelligence materials provide evidence that members of a Russian mercenary unit, «Wagner Group,» played a leading role in the atrocities. The materials also show that the military talked about the atrocities as if they were just discussing their daily lives. Some records indicate that incidents like those in Bucha happened in other places¹²⁰.

The Security Service of Ukraine has established the identities of three mercenaries of the PMC «Wagner,» who committed atrocities against civilians in the Kyiv region. They are accused of a total of 14 episodes: execution of civilians, torture and keeping people in basements without food and water, burning of residential buildings, and theft of property¹²¹.

Two captured mercenaries from the PMC «Redut» were sentenced to 11 years for torturing civilians. After the occupation of the village Novoplatonivka in the Kharkiv region, they tortured and robbed local residents, who were kept without food for several days in a hole dug in the forest. «*They took me for interrogation, beat me, and at night they shined a flashlight into the hole to check if I was alive. They beat me with a machine gun, their feet, and their hands. They also beat*

me to the knees, elbows, shoulders, and heels with a wooden hammer,» recalled one of the victims¹²².

The criminal who was recruited into the PMC «Wagner» from detention facilities revealed the mass killings of the civilian population, including teenagers and children committed by the mercenaries. *«What we did when we entered the cities of Soledar and Bakhmut was something. We were given the order to ‘clean’ and eliminate everyone. We are mercenaries and killers. When we were given the order to ‘clear’ a house, we executed it. We went and killed everyone—women, men, retirees, children. And I killed children. We were given the order, so I shot. She’s screaming, she’s a little child. She’s five or six years old, and I shot her. Point-blank. I wasn’t supposed to let anyone go. <...> They told us that Prigozhin gave the order not to let anyone leave the city. To destroy everyone. Everyone from 15 years old and up. Shoot everyone immediately without words. About 20-24 people were shot, of them, 10 were teenagers aged 15 to 17.»*¹²³



The leadership of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation was aware of the fear and aversion felt by residents of the occupied territories towards mercenaries and tried to blame them for the criminal actions of regular army servicemen. In the «Memo for a soldier of the Russian Armed Forces who are in the area of a special military operation in Ukraine,» soldiers were instructed: *«In case of emergency (traffic accidents involving civilians, alcohol/drug intoxication of servicemen, other cases that caused death or mutilation of civilians) shall introduce yourself as the member of the PMC «Wagner.»*¹²⁴ Issuing such instructions proves that the Russian

command is aware of the catastrophic state of discipline in the occupying forces and is trying to avoid accusations of violating the laws and customs of war by shifting the blame to the mercenaries.

In March 2023, the independent international UN commission investigating crimes in Ukraine specifically recommended to the Russian government to «*restrict the use of private military companies in the conflict*» since they operate outside of formal subordination, often violate international law, and are less accountable than regular armed force¹²⁵.

Despite those recommendations, The activities of the «Wagner» members were widely supported and popularized in society. «PMC Wagner Center» was opened in St. Petersburg, points for recruiting mercenaries operated in 42 cities of Russia¹²⁶, ads with an invitation to join the PMC was shown on television¹²⁷, media space was filled with complimentary materials about «Prigozhin's army,» TV companies released propaganda films «Wagner. Contract with the Motherland» and «The world's most experienced army.» Those efforts brought the desired result - as reported by one of the members of the Council of Commanders of the PMC «Wagner,» as of July 2023, approximately 78,000 company fighters have been recruited to go to the so-called «Ukrainian detachment»¹²⁸.

For Russians, the illegal participation of mercenaries and criminals in the subjugation of Ukraine was not only considered normal but also was an evidence of the nation's patriotism and a source of pride. According to the results of a survey conducted by the research group Russian Field from June 16-19, 2023, 55% of respondents approve of Prigozhin's activities during the war (while 14% disapprove)¹²⁹. Private military companies, despite their lack of legal status, were legislatively declared as «*organizations that assist in the execution of tasks assigned to the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation,*» mercenaries received the status of veterans of military operations, and criticizing them or publishing information about their criminal past

became «*discrediting participants of the military operation*» and since then could be punished by imprisonment of up to 15 years¹³⁰.

Despite previous denials from the Russian authorities regarding any connections with the PMC «Wagner,» in June 2023, Putin admitted: «*The maintenance of the ‘Wagner’ group was fully provided by the state from the Ministry of Defense’s budget and the state budget. We fully financed it.*» According to his statements, from May 2022 to May 2023, over 86 billion rubles from the Russian budget were allocated for salaries and incentive payments to «Wagner» fighters. Additionally, Russia spent another 110 billion rubles on insurance payments to mercenaries¹³¹.

On June 24, 2023, Prigozhin staged a protest against the leadership of the Russian Ministry of Defense, which the Kremlin considers a coup attempt. After this, the «Wagner» group was withdrawn from the front and relocated to Belarus. Despite this, the experience of using criminals in the war against Ukraine was recognized as successful, and the criminalization of the Russian Armed Forces gained momentum. The State Duma of the Russian Federation adopted a package of laws allowing a larger part of defendants, accused individuals, and convicts to enter into contracts with the Russian army for the war in Ukraine¹³². Starting from the fall of 2022, the Ministry of Defense has started to directly recruit convicts from penitentiary institutions¹³³. Alongside men, active recruitment of female convicts was underway – from the women’s prisons in southern Russia, around 100 individuals were taken into the Russian Armed Forces¹³⁴. As of June 2023, an additional 15,000 inmates were sent from places of detention to the military,¹³⁵ from which special assault units «Storm Z» were formed¹³⁶. «*By the summer of 2023, the face of the war has changed. The typical Russian fighter killed in Ukraine is no longer a professional soldier but a 34-year-old convict who headed to the front straight from the prison,*» according to

experts who are monitoring and verifying reports of Russian military casualties¹³⁷.

3.4. COMBAT GROUPS OF EXTREMISTS AND NEO-NAZIS

In addition to private military companies, Russian extremist units were involved in the occupation of Ukraine, including the «Russian Imperial Legion» (a paramilitary unit of the «Russian Imperial Movement») and the neo-nazi sabotage group «Rusich.»¹³⁸ Both groups have participated in the war since 2014; they profess chauvinism and neo-nazism and spread hatred for the Ukrainian state and Ukrainians.

On the day of the start of the full-scale invasion, the leader of the «Russian Imperial Legion,» Denys Gariev, wrote in «Telegram»: *«We are definitely in favor of the liquidation of the separatist entity called «Ukraine.»*¹³⁹ The leadership of the «Rusich» group described their vision of the future of Ukraine in a more straightforward way: *«We generally believe that the entire non-white population of Ukraine (women from the age of 10 and men from the age of 5) should be physically eliminated (part of it through scientific experiments). The remaining boys should be brought up as janissaries in the military service of Russia, and the girls, after the course of normal wives and with passports of non-citizens of the Russian Federation, should be given to Russian soldiers, 2 to 3 girls per one soldier. Blacks can also be distributed to non-Russians, but who fought for Russia. This is the solution to the demographic issue. Former Ukraine's property should also be divided between the soldiers. Soldiers should understand the benefits of their risks in the war, and a beggar's 200,000 a month (for which you can't buy anything in particular) is not very motivating.»*¹⁴⁰

Since 2014, extremist units' members have become widely known for their brutality, which they are proud of and actively promote.

«I am a nazi. When you kill a person, you feel the excitement of hunting. If you haven't been hunting, try it, it's interesting. At the base, everyone was laughing, they were giving ears as gifts,» Aleksei Milchakov, the leader of the «Rusich» group, said in an interview¹⁴¹.

«At the moment, I came here to kill Ukrainians. In principle, that's all,» Yevheni Rasskazov, a «Rusich» group member, in another interview.¹⁴² He is also known on social networks for his birthday greetings to Hitler¹⁴³.

«If you messed up, then try not to leave witnesses among locals,» the management of the «Rusich» group instructed its subordinates in its memo on how to treat the population of Ukraine¹⁴⁴.

In 2020, the United States and in 2021, Canada included the «Russian Imperial Movement» in the list of international terrorist organizations¹⁴⁵. The «Rusich» group was included in the sanctions lists of the USA, the European Union, Switzerland, New Zealand, and Japan in 2022. The group leader, Aleksei Milchakov, is on the sanctions lists of the USA,¹⁴⁶ as well as Great Britain, Canada, Switzerland, Australia, Japan, and New Zealand, due to his particular brutality.

Despite their relatively small number of fighters, the «Russian Imperial Legion» and «Rusich» group have become role models in the Russian army; their readiness for violence and brutality were presented by propaganda as determination and military courage. Popularity is not hindered by open neo-Nazi beliefs and statements of the leadership and members of the groups - participation in the war against Ukraine put them above the law and morality. *«Those who do not like our views and symbols will not be able to harm us. Your written statements about us are thrown into the trash*

by the Investigative Committee, the Federal Security Service, and other structures because veterans are inviolable. We will continue to teach our views to young fighters,» said Yevheni Rasskazov¹⁴⁷.

The cooperation of the Russian Armed Forces with neo-Nazi groups once again vividly demonstrated the absurdity of the goal of the war declared by the Kremlin - the so-called «denazification» of Ukrainian society. The Russian government cynically sorts ultranationalists into Friend or Foe categories and does not oppose the idea of national preference if it's the idea of the «Russian world's» preference, and its supporters have no disagreements with the regime and are ready to fight against Ukraine.

3.5. LAW ENFORCEMENT

In the Russian plans for the occupation of Ukraine, an important role was assigned to the law enforcement of the invading country - the Russian Guard (Rosgvardiya), the Federal Security Service (FSB), and special police units. Although international humanitarian law obliges the occupying state to provide protection and assistance to the residents of the occupied territories, it became clear from the first days of the intervention that the Russian security forces were primarily focused on performing repressive functions. The establishment of the «new order» and the «Russian world» was accompanied by the harsh suppression of peaceful street demonstrations and other forms of non-violent protest, arrests of civil activists and simple sympathizers of Ukraine, coercion of cooperation of local officials, and pressure on entrepreneurs and media representatives.

International investigators involved in the investigation of Russian war crimes have concluded that the security forces in the occupied territories have become an instrument of the

Kremlin's plan to destroy Ukrainian identity. «*The first stage included arrests and, in many cases, the killings of people designated as «leaders» - those who could physically or culturally resist the occupation,*» said Wayne Jordash, head of the Mobile Justice Team, a team of international investigators who cooperate with the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine. «*The second stage included the filtration process - those suspected of having ties to 'leaders' or involved in organizing any type of resistance were deported to Russia or held in isolation cells and tortured.*»¹⁴⁸

It should be noted that the entire history of law enforcement agencies in modern Russia is closely related to violence and brutality. Special services have become a pillar of Putin's authoritarian regime and have long been used by him to persecute political opponents and representatives of the public sector within the country. Under the guise of the need to intensify the fight against crime, the Russian security forces have systematically used and are using violence against their own people. Torture to obtain a confession and torture in places of detention ceased to be isolated excesses and became a well-known and familiar phenomenon in Russia. The leadership of the FSB, Rosgvardiya, Federal Penitentiary Service (FSIN), and the police deny the prevalence of traditions of violence in their departments. Even according to official data, the objectivity of which is not recognized by human rights activists, in 2019, Russian courts handed down convictions for torturing 641 law enforcement officers¹⁴⁹. Still, in the modern world of digital technologies and the availability of mobile video cameras, it is difficult to hide the truth - the Internet is full of materials about the brutality of Russian law enforcement officers.

In October 2021, the Gulagu.net project received and published video footage of the tortures and rapes of prisoners in the Saratov Tuberculosis Hospital No. 1. The video recordings were obtained from the programmer Serhiy Saveliev, who maintained the video recorders in the institutions of the penal

system. The programmer downloaded and exported 40 GB of video files, which recorded cases of inhumane treatment and rape of convicts in prisons in the Irkutsk, Saratov, and Vladimir regions¹⁵⁰.

In February-March 2022, law enforcement officers systematically used violence to stop anti-war protests in Russia: they knocked people to the ground, beat them with batons, strangled them, hit them against a wall, and broke their arms. At least 39 cases were recorded when an ambulance was called to the police stations in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Rostov-on-Don to hospitalize beaten demonstrators. At least 30 police departments in 9 cities of Russia reported the use of force. Lawyers discovered 52 reports about the unjustified use of force by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Russian Guard on February 24-28, 2022. During the actions on March 6, law enforcement officers used force against at least 34 detainees¹⁵¹.

In September 2022, in Moscow, the police broke into the apartment of Artyom K., who had publicly read anti-war poems the day before. After his arrest, he was beaten and raped with a barbell. The girl detained together with Artyom said that in the police station, they stuck stickers on her face, tried to glue her mouth shut, pulled out her hair, pushed her, and threatened her with gang rape. Then they showed her a videotape with the recording of how Artyom was raped¹⁵².

The Russian authorities «do not notice» the increase in the level of law enforcement violence, and the investigative committee and the judicial system demonstrate their uncharacteristic humanity towards law enforcement officers accused of brutality.

According to the results of consideration of complaints about torture by law enforcement officers, in 78% of cases, decisions were made to refuse to open a criminal case, and in another 10% - cases were closed during the investigation. Over

the past 12 years, approximately 40,000 cases of beatings and torture by Ministry of Internal Affairs employees, Rosgvardiya, and riot police remained without investigation and trials. Law enforcement officers were acquitted in courts ten times more often than civilians (data for 2020)¹⁵³.

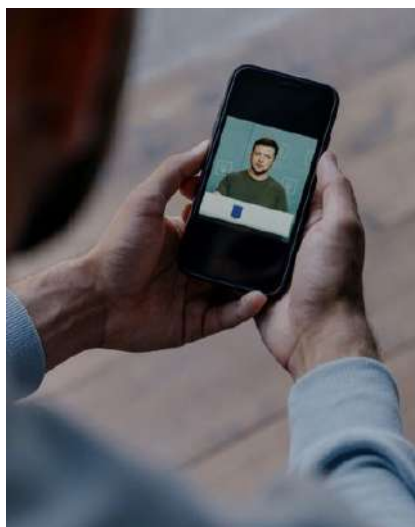


Experts of the UN Human Rights Committee expressed deep concern over the preservation of the practice of torture in Russia, which is exacerbated by the ineffective investigation of torture complaints, the introduction of repression against those who filed these complaints, as well as the lack of reliable and detailed statistics¹⁵⁴.

For many years, Russian law enforcement officers have been instilled with disrespect for human rights, a habit of using violence in the performance of their duties, and a belief in their own impunity. With their ruthless treatment of their citizens, Russia's law enforcement system was never inclined to be humane to the population of the country they intended to subjugate. Moreover, dispatches to occupied territories were used as a form of punishment. In the captured cities and villages of Ukraine, they sent not only law enforcement officers who had violated discipline but also those who were previously dismissed from service for committing crimes. They were promised a reinstatement in a special rank and the restoration of years of service for pension calculation. *«Those who have a guilty conscience and have problems in Russia are the ones who go to Ukraine. Those who know they are 'on the list' of the controlling authorities. They took bribes or violated something else, but the security service or the prosecutor's office*

hasn't proven it yet. That's who goes willingly,» explained one former policeman¹⁵⁵.

They clearly extended the philosophy of the permissibility of violence and entrenched models of behavior to the civilian population of the occupied territories. And due to the ideology of hatred towards Ukrainians and tangible combat losses, the brutality of law enforcement gained hypertrophied forms and scales



«Rosgvardiya was sent to the city, and they began to disperse the demonstrators. They used stun grenades, rubber bullets, and tear gas. Many people were injured. They grabbed people in the square and sent them to the basements. Detainees were beaten and tortured there - they were looking for patriots, soldiers, former police officers and SBU employees, volunteers, priests, and even hunters. Many were beaten and wounded when released; many are still missing. A few were killed and simply thrown out into the street,» says a resident of Kherson about the life of the townspeople during the occupation¹⁵⁶.

Andriy, a resident of Mariupol, on whose phone FSB officers found a video of the speech of the President of Ukraine, was tortured in the tent of the filtration point. *«One of them said: 'You told us that you are not interested in politics' and immediately hit me in the throat with his hand. Then others joined in the beating. They called it 're-education,»* Andrii recalls. The beating lasted more than two hours, after which the boy was forced to record a video message saying *«Glory to the Russian Army»* and was released. His mother was nearby and heard the FSB officers torturing her son. After Andrii, another man was brought into the tent - he had a patriotic tattoo. *«They*

immediately knocked him to the ground and started beating him. They didn't even ask,» Andriy said¹⁵⁷.

On March 26, 2022, the occupiers kidnapped the head of the village of Verkhnya Krynytsia, Zaporizhzhia region, and three other men. The people were brought to the seized premises of the Vasyilkiv district police department, where they were kept for several days. Detainees were stuck with needles under their nails, poured chemical reagents on their skin, tortured with electricity, and threatened that their relatives would be killed if they did not agree to cooperate with the occupation authorities and did not tell about local patriots. It was later established that employees of the Makhachkala riot police of the Rosgvardiya Directorate in the Republic of Dagestan tortured the men¹⁵⁸.

3.6. MOBILIZED SERVICEMEN

On September 21, 2022, for the first time since the Second World War, a «partial» mobilization was announced on the territory of Russia. Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu announced the intention to recruit 300 thousand people to the army, explaining the scale of the measure by the fact that *«Russia is fighting not so much with the Ukrainian army as with the collective West.»¹⁵⁹* Despite the hysterical war propaganda, the prospect of going to the frontline did not arouse enthusiasm among the Russian population - according to various sources, 700 thousand to 1 million Russians left the country to avoid mobilization measures¹⁶⁰.

Similarly to recruitment to volunteer battalions, the Russian government was forced to compensate for the shortage of human mobilization resources by reducing the requirements for new recruits. «The Military Commissariat will not spare anyone,» declared the military commissar of the Kursk region,¹⁶¹

and his words can easily become the motto of the all-Russian mobilization campaign.

The State Duma adopted a law that allows conscription for military service of persons with unexpunged or unexpired criminal records, including for certain serious crimes¹⁶². Recruitment for military service took place in psychoneurological dispensaries,¹⁶³ hostels,¹⁶⁴ хостелах¹⁶⁵ and shelters for people experiencing homelessness. People with mental disorders and drug addiction were sent to the army.

In October 2022, the police arrived at the «rescue hangar» of the Orthodox aid service «Miloserdie» (Moscow), took the passports of the homeless people present, loaded them onto buses, and took them away. An eyewitness claimed: *«The buses have been coming for three days now and pick up 20-25 people each time.»* The 60-year-old man later said that they were taken to the military commissariat. Another homeless person reported that the police *«used a little force»* and *«pressured them morally»*: *«If you don't sign the summons, there will be some kind of punishment. Terrible.»*¹⁶⁶

In the fall of 2022, doctors at Polyclinic No. 99 in St. Petersburg were required to hand out summonses to patients who came to see them. The audio recording with the chief physician's corresponding order was published on the Internet. In total, local doctors issued more than 100 summonses to men of draft age¹⁶⁷.

31-year-old Semen L. was mobilized from Tyumen at the beginning of October 2022. According to his mother, he was treated at a regional psychiatric hospital for deep depression and paranoid schizophrenia and should continue taking special medications. The employees of the Military Commissariat were not bothered by his diagnosis¹⁶⁸. In the Novgorod region, drug addict Aleksandr S., who also suffers from hepatitis C, was mobilized for the war. According to his mother, he is registered in a drug dispensary and has an unbalanced psyche.

Despite this, he was sent to serve without passing a medical examination¹⁶⁹.

Similarly to volunteer recruitment, mobilization was most active in stagnant regions. *«The likelihood of men from Buryatia dying in the war in Ukraine is 75 times higher than that of men from Moscow. Overall, 8 out of 10 Russian regions with the highest mortality rates in the war are in Siberia and the Far East. Most of these regions are considered economically disadvantaged,»* say researchers from the University of Exeter (United Kingdom)¹⁷⁰.

The Kremlin actively involved labor migrants in the war against Ukraine, primarily from Central Asian countries. In September 2022, the State Duma of the Russian Federation established a simplified procedure for foreigners to obtain Russian citizenship if they serve in the Russian army for at least a year¹⁷¹. A conscription point of the Ministry of Defense is opened at the «Sakharov» immigration center. Instead of deporting immigrants who broke the law from the country, they were offered to go to the army¹⁷². Agitation leaflets were posted on the premises for the detention of illegal migrants, inviting foreigners to join the army, promising financial rewards and Russian citizenship¹⁷³. Agitation was even conducted in mosques, where funds were collected for the war after prayers, and immigrants were strongly encouraged to join the ranks of the Russian armed forces¹⁷⁴. Russian human rights activists have documented numerous cases of police raids on immigrants in places of their compact residence to force them to agree to military service. Special pressure was applied to foreigners who had been convicted of conditional imprisonment for committing crimes.

«The immigrant detention center in Stavropol actively recruits Central Asian citizens detained for violating Russian immigration legislation. These people have already bought tickets to return to their home countries, but the military, who came to the center, prevent them from leaving,» reports

Ruslan Vahapov, an expert of the non-governmental organization «Russia Behind Bars.»¹⁷⁵

«Anything is possible in Russia now. There are cases when immigrants are detained on the street by the police or Rosgvardiya. They are beaten, tortured, and forced to join the army. Of course, they agree to serve,» says Valentina Chupik, head of the human rights foundation «Tong Jahony.»¹⁷⁶ *«In addition to physical violence, foreigners sentenced to suspended sentences are also threatened with a revocation of the suspension and imposition of the actual sentence in prison. And there, once again, they will be beaten and sent to the same war,»* argues the human rights activist¹⁷⁷.

3A 30-year-old citizen of Tajikistan was sent to the front against his will instead of deportation. The man was detained near St. Petersburg for an illegal stay in Russia, and the court ruled on his deportation. However, from the temporary detention center, he and several other foreigners were taken to a military unit in the Leningrad region. When the man began to protest that he had not signed a military service contract and did not want to go to war, his commander claimed that everything had been signed for him and threatened him with imprisonment¹⁷⁸.

Uzbeks serving sentences in a Russian prison in Chelyabinsk have appealed to the President of Uzbekistan with a request to transfer them to their homeland because they fear they may be sent to the war in Ukraine¹⁷⁹.

Visible social inequality in the mobilization, which has taken on overtly coercive forms, resulted in a skeptical attitude of those mobilized toward legal norms, leading them to ignore military ethics and bred hatred for the opposing people, whom they felt they were compelled to fight due to their intransigence. In the stressful conditions of war, the psychologically oppressed and embittered conscripts resorted to violence and uncontrolled aggression even on minor occasions, venting

their complexes and fears about the future on those around them. This dangerous but entirely predictable behavior was fully demonstrated during combat training and deployment.

During the training at the shooting range in the Belgorod region of the Russian Federation, three mobilized servicemen from among the foreign citizens shot with a machine gun other soldiers who were nearby. The Ministry of Defense of Russia informed about 11 killed and 16 wounded, although according to eyewitness testimony, there were many more victims¹⁸⁰.

In December 2022, at the Misyash station of the Chelyabinsk region, in the compartment of the headquarters car of the military echelon, an intoxicated mobilized soldier attacked and beat the captain, who was also mobilized earlier. Due to his injuries, the officer died on the spot¹⁸¹.

In the village of Mulino (Nizhny Novgorod region, Russia), near a military training center, four intoxicated soldiers abused a local taxi driver who was taking them to a sauna. Because he got into an accident, the servicemen brutally beat the man and cut off his pinkie finger with a knife. In addition, the taxi driver suffered rib fractures, a concussion, lung damage, and multiple hematomas. *«There are a lot of mobilized people, and some of them have come here inadequately. They drink in groups and roam around. Literally! In the morning, you go to work, and there are bodies everywhere (...) It has become frightening to live here with these mobilized individuals. One of them walks around with an ax, and others almost killed the taxi driver. It's scary for the children. Maybe we'll take some action and report this somewhere?»* residents of the village are complaining on social media¹⁸².

In October 2022, in the city of Vasylivka, Zaporizhia region, four mobilized servicemen entered a farm and slaughtered 13 cows, and then attacked and beat their colleagues - Russian servicemen who were near the farm. Then, mobilized servicemen stole the car from local workers and tried to pass through

the checkpoint, where Russian soldiers tried to stop them. In response, mobilized servicemen opened fire and wounded the Russian sergeant. According to eyewitnesses, they themselves did not understand what they were doing because they were drunk almost to the point of fainting¹⁸³.

The mobilization conducted in Russia relocated a significant number of individuals from marginal segments of society to the occupied territories of Ukraine, granting them weapons and the authority to use those weapons. It is clear that soldiers who mercilessly torture and kill even their fellow countrymen will not treat the civilian population of the country they were forced to fight against with humanity.

4. *THE DISCIPLINE*

The readiness of military personnel to comply with the laws and customs of war depends primarily on the state of army discipline, which must guarantee the soldiers' respect for the norms of international humanitarian law and make it impossible for them to cause suffering to civilians in the combat zone. It is the discipline built on the principles of unity of command, the duty of a serviceman to obey the orders of his commander and fulfill the requirements of the statutes, that prevents the army from turning into an unruly armed mob.

Trained for pompous parades and outwardly impressive large-scale exercises, Russian military personnel proved unprepared for the harsh realities of a full-scale war, which was radically different from Russia's previous fast-moving expeditionary operations against a much weaker enemy. The confidence of the soldiers in their own strength and their faith in the competence of the military leaders were quickly dispelled by catastrophic losses and failures at the front. Dispirited and

demoralized professional servicemen, who were considered the elite of the Russian army on the eve of the invasion, avoided taking part in hostilities in every possible way - they damaged their own equipment, deserted and refused to obey the orders of their commanders, accusing the latter of intending to build a career at the expense of the deaths of ordinary soldiers. The military leadership, which recently called discipline «the backbone of the Russian Armed Forces,» was rapidly losing control over personnel.

The inclusion of non-army units into the occupation group, lack of qualified junior commanders, bad relations between officers and rank-and-file, and well-established traditions of hazing worsened the situation. Cases of disobedience to leadership, drunkenness, fraternization, and ethnic-based conflicts between soldiers of different units became common in Russian units:

In the Zaporizhzhia region, after an argument, the commander of a Russian tank drove his T-90 not at the enemy but at a group of the Russian Guard unit. He fired at their checkpoint and blew it up¹⁸⁴.

In June 2022, four FSB officers entered a cafe. They reprimanded two servicemen from the Russian Armed Forces because they were drinking in their military uniforms and carrying weapons in the cafe. After an argument and mutual insults, one of the soldiers opened fire at the FSB officers with an automatic weapon. They began to shoot in response. As a result, two FSB officers and one serviceman were killed on the spot, while another soldier and one FSB officer were hospitalized with injuries¹⁸⁵.

At the beginning of February 2023, conscripts from Tuva recorded a video message in which they accused the militants of the «people's militia of the DPR» of beatings and abuse. *«They shot at us, forced us to do push-ups. They promised*

that we would not get out of here alive. The military police came and also beat us,» complained one of the conscripts.»¹⁸⁶

A video has been posted online in which two Russian servicemen degraded a mobilized individual from North Ossetia, who stood before them on his knees with a battered face. In this video, one of the servicemen repeatedly kicked the soldier in the head while the other demanded that he buy him a sleeping bag¹⁸⁷.

Even towards their fellow countrymen, the servicemen acted with extreme cruelty, using violence as a means of punishment for any offense.

The mercenaries of the PMC «Wagner» captured, beat, and forced the brigade commander, a Russian Army lieutenant colonel, to apologize on camera, suspecting him of giving orders to mine the exit routes of the «Wagner» group from their combat positions. Subsequently, the lieutenant colonel revealed that the «Wagner» mercenaries had previously repeatedly abused Russian soldiers who served in neighboring units. They humiliated them, forced them to carry corpses, and used them as laborers. One of the servicemen was kept in a cold basement, had chemical substances sprayed in his eyes, was doused with gasoline, and a lighter was brought near, threatening to set him on fire. Another soldier was beaten and raped by the mercenaries, after which he took his own life¹⁸⁸.

A soldier's mother approached the President of the Russian Federation with a complaint, stating that her son had been raped by his fellow soldiers. The rapists were under the influence of drugs and threatened the victim with murder. The woman requested an investigation, as the regiment's command had decided to cover up the crime¹⁸⁹.

Russian army servicemen posted an online video about conducting «rehabilitative work» with a mobilized soldier on

the frontline. They beat him to the point of being unrecognizable and then hung him by his arms from a tree¹⁹⁰.

According to a 2017 study, one in four female military personnel in the Russian army experienced sexual harassment from their superiors¹⁹¹. The conditions on the frontline exacerbated the problem, with sexually aggressive behavior from male commanders toward their female subordinates becoming a common form of misconduct.

A contract female soldier recounted how officers, through threats and sometimes physical violence, coerced married women from the medical unit into sexual relationships. She said, «*There were seven women, aged 23 to 38, and they tried to 'assign' each of us to commanders. They distributed us – some to reconnaissance, others to tank crews, and some to infantry. When I refused, the colonel decided to punish me for it. While everyone else slept in tents and small buildings, I slept on the ground in a small forest for a month. They could have left me hungry. Then, on his orders, they threw me into artillery right at the front. I saw with my own eyes how an officer shot his 'own' girl. Maybe he drank too much or was jealous; I don't know. They staged it as if Ukrainians had done it. She survived but became disabled. As a result, almost all the girls, through threats or ridicule, making life unbearable, were broken and forced to provide sexual services. Some even slept with several men. But nobody condemned them, as survival was the only concern. And the girls mostly resigned themselves to it, deciding it was better to live in this war like in paradise – well-fed and with cigarettes.*»¹⁹²

One of the indicators of the decline of discipline in the Russian army was the widespread practice of theft and robbery of the civilian population in the occupied territories. The doctrine of «lightning victory over Ukraine» did not provide for the long-term supply of military units with supplies, ammunition, fuel and lubricants, and medicine. In the first weeks of the full-scale war, Russian soldiers faced a serious issue of the

lack of a sufficient supply of food, change of clothes, medication, hygiene products, and other basic necessities, which became the first incentive for looting and robbery. «The guys were going from apartment to apartment and were walking out with big bags - robbery in all its glory,» a Russian military man wrote in his diary in March 2022. «*Someone takes only the necessary; some take everything: from old broken telephones to plasma TVs, computers and expensive alcohol.*»¹⁹³

Later, this shameful phenomenon rose to an impressive scale, robberies are accompanied by murders and violence against civilians, and even high-ranking commanders take part in them. During just the first three months of the full-scale war, Russian officers and soldiers sent parcels containing looted property with a total weight of 58 tons to up to 60 settlements within the territory of Russia¹⁹⁴.

«*Deputy rear commander colonel stole refrigerators from stores. Then we were looking for stores with sneakers and any kind of clothes - we took all this. All those goods were taken in trucks. When we arrived in Belarus, I saw those two trucks,*» a soldier of the Russian 64th motorized rifle brigade, which took part in the occupation of the Kyiv Region, told journalists¹⁹⁵.

After the capture of the village of Andriivka in the Kyiv region, the chief of staff of a motorized infantry brigade forced a woman out of her house into the yard and, in an attempt to intimidate her, fired several shots from his automatic weapon over her head. Subsequently, he ordered his subordinates to rob the house. The Russians took \$50,000, 43,000 EUR, and 150,000 UAH, as well as property valued at half a million UAH: a television, five laptops, two cameras with lenses, two phones, two power generators, and various tools¹⁹⁶.

A video camera recorded a group of Russian servicemen driving up to a car dealership near Mriya village in the Kyiv region. The owner of the business and a 68-year-old security guard met them with their hands up in a gesture of surrender.

The soldiers searched the civilians, who, after a brief conversation, even treated the servicemen with cigarettes. But when civilians turned around and calmly walked back into the dealership building, soldiers shot those unarmed people in the back with machine guns, robbed the salon, loaded things into a car, and drove away. As it was determined later, one of the perpetrators was an officer, a senior lieutenant from the 5th separate guard's tank brigade¹⁹⁷.

The rapid spread of alcohol consumption and drug use by servicemen became a real problem for the Russian army in the occupied territories. From January to June 2023, the Rostov Military Court considered at least 48 cases of soldiers abusing alcohol, the so-called Crimean Military Court handled 38 such cases, and the Vladikavkaz Military Court had 29 cases (for comparison, in January 2022, a month before the start of the full-scale war, the so-called Crimean Military Court had only four similar cases, and the Vladikavkaz Military Court had none). During this same period, 34 criminal cases related to drug possession and distribution were submitted to Russian military courts in regions adjacent to Ukraine. The risk of punishment did not deter soldiers. «*Everyone drinks, especially in volunteer units. The closer to the front, the more they drink,*» one of them told journalists¹⁹⁸. Videos are appearing on the internet where Russian soldiers are shown using narcotics as a group, with one of them filming the process¹⁹⁹.

From intercepted phone conversations of Russian servicemen with family and acquaintances:

«*Cases of liquor are disappearing by the crate in one night. Then they start shooting and hitting each other with axes*»²⁰⁰.

«*We have the first and second companies here. They get drunk and shoot each other. In the first company, a soldier*

got drunk and pulled the pin on a grenade. As a result, one dead and two wounded»²⁰¹.

«They drink, and then they start acting weird among themselves - shooting, throwing grenades, and cutting each other. Their own people. One of ours was shooting, and he was just drunk. It's everywhere. We were in the city, and our guys and the 'Akhmat' people started shooting at each other. Alcoholism makes itself known»²⁰².

Low morale, lack of motivation, and an unsatisfactory state of military discipline hindered the performance of combat tasks. Aware of the problem, Russian commanders are trying to restore their authority and force subordinates to obey. However, such a task is often solved in an illegal way - instead of using the disciplinary sanctions provided for by the statute, physical punishment, humiliation, and detention in inhumane treatment are used. In military teams, brutality became the most effective way of managing personnel.

To punish soldier offenders, basements and so-called «zindans» are used – pits dug into the ground under the open sky. *«Those who are guilty are beaten and thrown into the pit. The floor there is made of earth. You sleep on the ground. They might not feed you or give you water. Every regiment, every unit has such a pit. Statutes and laws don't apply here,»* acknowledges a mobilized officer²⁰³.

The Russian commander punished ten soldiers for withdrawing from their position to the rear to evacuate the wounded. He put his subordinates on the ground, and after that, he brutally beat them with a rubber baton and kicked them. The other two soldiers held the perpetrators at gunpoint in order to suppress possible resistance. The explanations of the accused that they were only following the orders of another commander were not taken into account²⁰⁴.

«Anyone caught using alcohol or smelling of it will face a broken hand and jaw. After that, we shamefully exclude them from the group,» warns a recruitment Telegram channel of the volunteer unit «Espanyola.»²⁰⁵

A female military serviceman of the Russian army told journalists about the punishment method practiced in her unit: «They were forced to dig their own graves. They would dig a pit themselves and lie down in it under the barrels of rifles. And other guys would bury them with soil. There's nothing left outside, not even their heads. Well, they could lie like that for some time. Then the platoon leader or company commander would step forward, and fire bursts into these pits.»²⁰⁶

The Russian army has probably started deploying barrier troops, according to British military intelligence. In a daily briefing published by the UK Ministry of Defense on Twitter, such units are to force Russian soldiers to advance and shoot those who retreat. According to intelligence, recently, Russian generals demanded commanders use weapons against deserters. The introduction of the practice of executions shows the lack of discipline in the Russian troops, the summary says²⁰⁷.

Military personnel learn the lesson of brutality from their superiors and reproduce it. Arbitrariness breaks out of internal army relations and becomes the norm in the treatment of civilians. Fighters are guided by the logic: «If violence is applied to us, why should the civilian population of a foreign country be an exception.» The soldiers quickly stop playing their assigned role of «kind saviors of the population from the nazis» and show their true faces as ruthless occupiers

International humanitarian law puts responsibility for the acts and actions of military personnel to their commanders, who, due to their higher hierarchical position, have the opportunity and are obliged to prevent the commission of war crimes by subordinates. Article 87 of Additional Protocol No. 1

to the Geneva Conventions relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts obliges the state party to «require any commander who is aware that subordinates or other persons under his control are going to commit or have committed a breach of the Conventions or of this Protocol, to initiate such steps as are necessary to prevent such violations of the Conventions or this Protocol, and, where appropriate, to initiate disciplinary or penal action against violators thereof.»

However, the Russian command is concerned only with the situation at the frontline and applied punishment only to eradicate numerous cases of desertion and non-compliance with combat orders. At the same time, the duty to ensure the humane treatment of the civilian population provided by international law is blatantly ignored by military leaders. Commanders at all levels «fail to notice» and sometimes even approve and encourage deviant behavior by their subordinates toward the civilian population.

British lawyer Wayne Jordash KC, who advises the Ukrainian prosecution on the investigation of crimes by Russian military personnel, has reported that he saw signs of tacit consent by commanders in 30 cases he has reviewed²⁰⁸.

Iryna Didenko, a representative of the prosecutor's office handling cases of sexual violence, points to the existence of evidence that Russian commanders knew about the rape of Ukrainian women by subordinates. In some cases, they condoned this and gave the soldiers permission to «go and relax.» In one of the episodes, which is described in the investigation record, the commander allowed his subordinates to enter the apartment building, but he himself remained outside. At the same time, the soldiers could be heard talking about women and saying: «*We'll just beat this one, and we'll rape this one.*»²⁰⁹

The tacit consent and solidarity of the leaders convince the soldiers of impunity and encourage them to commit new war crimes.

On occupied territories, Russian officers not only condoned the illegal actions of subordinates but also initiated war crimes themselves; they gave clearly criminal orders to kill and torture civilians. Although such orders, by their nature, were obviously and unconditionally outside the boundaries of law and morality, the soldiers obeyed while being aware of the illegality of their actions. Quite often, commanders personally killed and tortured civilians, setting an example for their soldiers to follow.

«We brought the civilians into the house. They had a wad of cash with them: hryvnias, dollars, and various other small things. The lieutenant colonel, who was with us, took the money for himself, gave the rest of the phones and other things to us, and said: «Shoot them.» I shot one of them. I told him: «Go ahead» - he went. I told him: «On your knees.» And then I just shot a bullet in the back of his head. After that, I was shaking for a very long time,» a Russian soldier told journalists²¹⁰.

The Security Service of Ukraine released an audio recording of the occupier's phone conversation with his acquaintance: *«We were going to take up positions and arrived under the bridges. Ukrainians - military and civilians - were lying there. We were told to kill them - all those Ukrainians. Well, I thought then - maybe I should try and cut the throat? And I cut it. I just thought - when am I going to cut someone's throat again?»*²¹¹

On March 20, 2022, Russian servicemen occupied the Ukrainian village of Pakul in the Chernihiv Region. The Russians kidnapped two local residents, kept them in a basement, beat them, and demanded information about civilians who owned weapons. On March 25, the company commander went into the basement and, outraged that the villagers did not tell anything, shot the men in their limbs²¹².

Discipline in the armed forces is supported by the application of disciplinary and criminal sanctions, which, if necessary, correct the behavior of servicemen at all levels of the hierarchy.

Article 86 of Additional Protocol No. 1 to the Geneva Conventions relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts obliges the signatory state to repress violations of international humanitarian law and to ensure that military commanders who do not take all feasible measures within their power to prevent or repress the commission of war crimes by subordinates bear penal or disciplinary responsibility. Russian legislation makes it possible to fulfill such requirements of the Protocol. In particular, Article 356 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation recognizes as a crime «*the use of prohibited means and methods of waging war*» and prescribes punishment in the form of imprisonment for a term of up to 20 years for «*cruel treatment of prisoners of war or the civilian population, looting of national property in the occupied territory, use in armed conflict means and methods prohibited by the international treaty of the Russian Federation.*»

However, Russia has yet again shown that in the war against Ukraine, it has no intention of complying with either international or its own legal rules. The gruesome massacre in Bucha arranged by Russian military personnel was not a reason for an investigation but a reason for pride. The brutality of the Russian soldiers was highly appreciated and demonstrably approved by the Kremlin. At a time when the world was looking with horror at the photos of tortured Ukrainians and listening to the stories of those who survived, Vladimir Putin awarded the 64th Motorized Rifle Brigade, which committed atrocities in Bucha, with the honorary title. The decree stated that the brigade showed «*mass heroism, bravery, resilience, and courage*» during the «*defense of the motherland.*»²¹³

Its commander, Azatbek Omurbekov, received the rank of colonel and was awarded the title of «*Hero of the Russian Federation*» - the highest state award of Russia, which is awarded for outstanding services to the state and heroic deeds²¹⁴. The brutality of the Russian soldiers was highly appreciated and demonstrably approved by the Kremlin.

5. *PROPAGANDA AND SOCIAL SUPPORT*

5.1. PERMANENT CRISIS OF HUMANITY

The level of humane treatment of the civilian population of the enemy country by military personnel is determined not only by the orders of commanders, the requirements of statutes, or the quality of training of personnel. The morality of soldiers' behavior in war is also determined by the social norms that are customary in their peaceful lives. The political system, culture, spiritual directions customary in society, interpersonal formal and informal rules of coexistence - all these factors significantly influence the decisions a military serviceman takes during contact with the civilian population. In a society where peace and human life are valued, soldiers are more inclined to behave ethically and try not to cause unnecessary suffering to civilians, even in war. On the contrary, military personnel consider brutality to be natural and even desirable behavior if violence is tolerated in society.

Unlike Ukraine, the history of modern Russia is an endless chronology of wars and armed conflicts, which not only



supported the combat readiness of the Russian army but also shaped the mentality of Russian society. War has always been around, and Russians do not perceive participation in it as a catastrophe. Long ago, the Russian people became a community of potential combatants ready to support and participate in any war, regardless of its goals and methods of conduct. Military operations in the Chechen Republic, Moldova, Georgia, and Syria psychologically prepared Russians for the brutality of war, and information about the bloody events in Ukraine did not cause them significant stress, as it fully corresponded to their ideas about the world order. Russian society quickly got involved in another war, morally adapted to it, and now perceives it as a part of the country's life. After a year of the extermination of Ukrainians and their own combat losses, 52% of Russians polled said that they would not reverse the decision to launch a «special military operation» if they had the opportunity to go back in time²¹⁵. According to another survey, 47% said that they do not want the withdrawal of troops from Ukraine and the start of peace talks if the goals announced by the «operation» are not achieved²¹⁶. In June 2023, 73% of Russian citizens continued to believe that their country was moving in the right direction²¹⁷.

Models of soldiers' behavior in war are formed not only by military training but also by their previous civilian life. The abnormal cruelty of Russian military personnel is a hypertrophied reflection of the social problem - tolerated cruelty of the Russian society as a whole. The Russian Federation has always been characterized by a fairly high level of criminal and domestic violence, accompanying Russians everywhere and throughout their life. Russia is traditionally one of the leaders in the ranking of European countries in terms of the number of murders²¹⁸ and the number of prisoners per 100,000 citizens²¹⁹. The second largest category of prisoners in Russia is murderers. So, in 2020, there were 95,000 murderers and only 53,000 thieves in prisons. Six out of ten prisoners are recidivists²²⁰.

According to Rosstat, in 2016, 65,543 people suffered from criminal offenses related to the use of violence in the family²²¹ (after the partial decriminalization of domestic violence by the State Duma of the Russian Federation in January 2017, obtaining fresh objective data became impossible). Based on those published in 2011-2019 court verdicts, 66% of the total number of women killed in Russia died at the hands of a partner or relative²²². Sociologists believe that 52% of teenagers in the Russian Federation have become victims of bullying²²³. 15.7% of the surveyed elderly people stated that they had faced abuse²²⁴.

34% of Russians consider it acceptable under certain circumstances to use torture in law enforcement agencies²²⁵. In January 2017, 50% of citizens expressed their support for the law, which decriminalized domestic violence if the beating was committed for the first time²²⁶. At the same time, the draft law «*On the Prevention of Domestic Violence*» was withdrawn from consideration. The Russian Orthodox Church also opposed its adoption. «*While fighting the use of force, we must not invade the family space of other people. Such a situation is destructive for traditional family and spiritual and moral values,*» explained Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia²²⁷.

In 2019, experts from the Institute of Psychology of the Russian Academy of Sciences stated: «*Comparative studies show that in the context of aggression, rudeness, and hatred, Russian society looks terrible. The country is experiencing a «moral impasse.»*²²⁸ «*In Russia, everyone hates everyone. Each social stratum has its own objects of hatred. There are no moral taboos in society,*» said Serhii Yenikolopov, head of the Scientific Center for Mental Health of the Russian Academy of Medical Sciences²²⁹.

5.2. DRAGON'S TEETH

War is one of the most destructive and horrifying forms of violence, which evokes disgust and repulsion among civilized humanity. Modern Europe has grown accustomed to peaceful coexistence, and this stable order seemed unshakable. However, with the strengthening of Putin's authoritarian regime within Russia, his foreign policy imperial ambitions were also on the rise. Driven by the revanchist doctrine of «rising from our knees,» the Kremlin increasingly interfered in the internal affairs of other countries and openly demonstrated readiness to redraw borders and resolve international conflicts through military means. In April 2008, the Russian President declared, «*Russia will no longer be complaisant,*» after the NATO summit in Bucharest, where he first introduced the idea of the supposed artificiality of the Ukrainian state and asserted that Russia is ready to defend «its interests» in Ukraine: «*Who can tell us that our interests are not there? There are regions where only the Russian population lives, for example, in Crimea. Southern Ukraine, it's all Russians there.*»²³⁰ Such a worldview inevitably led to aggression not only against Ukraine but also against other neighboring countries, a significant portion of whose population consisted of ethnic Russians or Russian-speaking citizens.

Already in August 2008, Russia demonstrated the seriousness of its intentions by initiating the first war in the 21st century on the European continent. Russian armed forces, outnumbering the opposing army several times, invaded Georgia, rapidly advancing deep into the country and stopping only a few kilometers from its capital. As a result of the «five-day war,» Georgia lost control over parts of its territory - South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which Russia recognized as independent states on August 26, 2008, and brought them under its political and economic control. In the Kremlin, the war was called «*an operation to enforce peace,*» and propaganda began to work on methods of instilling a sense of confidence in the righteousness

of Russians despite the evident aggressiveness of their country's actions. The efforts of propagandists in distorting reality did not go in vain – according to a 2008 survey, only 4% of respondents placed the responsibility for the war on the leadership of the Russian Federation²³¹. In August-September 2008, Putin's approval rating reached a record level of 88% at that time²³². Russian society enjoyed feeling like a triumphalist, and it was grateful to its leader for that. The war did not lead to international isolation or any serious sanctions against Russia. Georgia's example inspired the Kremlin: achievements in world politics were possible not only through diplomatic efforts but also through the use of force, and such force needs to be possessed.

Putin understood that the geopolitical project of the so-called «*return of ancestral lands*» and «*restoration of historical justice*» required not only the modernization of the armed forces but also the participation of the entire population of the country. Alongside the increase in the combat readiness of the army as part of the declared military reform, Russians were psychologically prepared for the possibility and even inevitability of future war. By manipulating history, using the rhetoric of Western hostility, and implanting the idea of the exceptionalism of the «*Russian world*,» the authorities were shaping mass consciousness – militarization of society began, and the «nation of victors» in the future war was being formed.

In 2010, the government approved the «*Concept of the Federal System for Training Citizens of the Russian Federation for Military Service for the Period up to 2030.*» This training included the publication and dissemination of military-patriotic literature and educational materials for military-patriotic associations; the creation, printing, and screening of films with military themes; the development, production, and distribution of military-patriotic computer games among the youth²³³.

In 2011 and 2016, four-year state programs for «Patriotic Education of Citizens of the Russian Federation» were adopted,

which openly had a militaristic character and involved intensive preparation of Russians for fulfilling their «duty to protect the interests of the Motherland» - from the development of military units' sponsorship over educational institutions to the creation of a significant number of cadet schools and classes within the education system. These programs were generously funded by the state - the total funding for the Program for 2016-2020 amounts to 1,718,691.5 thousand rubles²³⁴. As of 2022, cadet classes were already present in one-third of Moscow schools²³⁵.

In 2012, Sergei Shoigu became the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation, initiating an unprecedented PR campaign to popularize the armed forces of Russia. The appearance of military uniforms changed, and on social media, the Ministry of Defense shared videos highlighting the excellent training of Russian soldiers. On the military federal TV channel «Zvezda,» experts discussed the highly technical equipment of the army. Military and paramilitary competitions, such as «Tank Biathlon,»²³⁶, «Race of Heroes,»²³⁷, «International Army Games,»²³⁸, and «Zarnitsa,»²³⁹ were conducted and televised with the support of the defense department.

Military rituals and symbols became of utmost importance in society. Victory Day gradually became the country's main holiday,²⁴⁰ with nearly 1 billion rubles spent on its celebration in Moscow alone in 2020.²⁴¹ Military parades on Red Square were positioned as a reminder to NATO of the power of the Russian army. Since 2008, heavy military equipment, fighter jets, and strategic bombers have been participating in the parade. The procession «*Immortal Regiment*» transformed from an expression of mourning into a demonstration of a fighting spirit²⁴². Despite its status as a «*voluntary citizen initiative*,» the government oversaw the procession and compelled schoolchildren, students, and government employees to participate²⁴³. With the support of pro-government organizations, the campaign «George's Ribbon» gained momentum - wearing it

publicly symbolized allegiance to Russia's interests. By 2010, over 55 million ribbons were distributed worldwide,²⁴⁴ and in 2014, they were produced on an industrial scale by ten textile enterprises²⁴⁵.

Adherence to the militaristic rituals introduced by Russia became a marker of «us-versus-them» in international relations. In 2010, Putin declared that the Second World War was primarily won due to the human resources of the Russian Federation²⁴⁶. Subsequently, appeals to the «bloodshed by our grandfathers» became one of the arguments in propagating Russians' right to intervene in the affairs of neighboring countries. Propagandist and television host Keosayan (husband of the chief editor of RT channel Margarita Simonyan) threatened the government of Kazakhstan for its decision to cancel the Victory Day parade, and in response, he was included in the list of «undesirable persons» for entry²⁴⁷.

The Kremlin sowed the dragon's teeth, and they found fertile ground. Russians' peaceful attitudes quickly shifted to belligerent ones, and the pacifist thesis of «*let there be no war*» transformed into an aggressive «*we can repeat.*» The cult of «war and victory» in society bordered on religious fanaticism, which its few critics aptly call «*pobedobesie*» or «*victory madness.*»

5.3. «KRYMNASH» OR «CRIMEA [IS] OURS» AND THE MONUMENT TO DECEIT

Unlike Ukrainians, Russians did not perceive the annexation of Crimea in 2014 as the beginning of a Russian-Ukrainian war. Right from the beginning of the aggression, the Kremlin not only violated the rules of warfare - Russian servicemen acted without insignia,²⁴⁸ but also tested society's reaction to the legalization of public falsehood.

Initially, the Kremlin categorically denied accusations of seizing the territory of a neighboring country. Defense Minister Shoigu referred to reports of the presence of Russian soldiers in Crimea as «complete nonsense and provocation» and stated that he had «no idea» where the «polite people» in uniforms, who were blocking Ukrainian military facilities, modern weaponry, and military equipment, came from²⁴⁹. During a press conference, President Putin, with a smile, referred to his soldiers as «local self-defense forces,» claiming that Russia had no involvement²⁵⁰. However, after the official incorporation of Crimea into the Russian Federation, the position changed radically - the Kremlin recognized military intervention²⁵¹. In 2015, in an interview for the film «*Crimea: The Path to the Motherland*,» Putin revealed that the operation to capture the peninsula had been carefully planned, and it was he who gave the order for its execution on February 22, 2014²⁵².

Self-exposure to deceit did not lead to a scandal. On the contrary, the cynical deception by the country's top officials was accepted by Russian society with approval as evidence of the wartime and geopolitical genius of their president. Putin's approval rating increased by 15%, from 65% in January 2014 to 80% in March²⁵³.



The alienation of neighboring territories was met with pride and excitement by Russians: 88% supported the annexation, 34% felt «pride for the country,» and 31% felt a «sense of triumph of justice.»²⁵⁴ The neologism «Krymnash» or «Crimea [is] ours» won in the Russian «Word of the Year-2014» competition, while «polite people» and «Russian world» won in the «Expression of the

Year» category²⁵⁵. For Ukrainians, the monument to «polite people»²⁵⁶ erected in Crimea became a monument to Russia's lies and treachery.

Propagandists and media received an important lesson: the Russian audience is uncritical of transmitted information, and outright false claims do not trigger rejection. Propaganda may contradict truth and journalistic ethics but must align with society's sentiments, for whom the government's ideological agenda is more important than truth and morality. Russians were not only willing to believe falsehood but also to pretend that they believed it. Even after nine years, when the details of Crimea's seizure became known down to the smallest details, 86% of Russian citizens claimed to be confident in the correctness of the Kremlin's decision²⁵⁷.

The international community's response to the annexation of Crimea was weak, which finally convinced Russians of the effectiveness of using force in interstate relations. In their consciousness, the imperial concept of the possibility of returning to the borders of «great Russia» ceased to be purely theoretical and found its real confirmation on the changed world map. The sanctions introduced in response only emphasized other countries' inability to counter Russia's military power and became a reason for ridicule²⁵⁸. Feeling the support of society, the authorities hinted at new victories and called for unity. The warlike expectations of Russians were justified - after Crimea, the Donbas followed.

5.4. DONBAS – SCOUTING BY COMBAT

The destabilization of the situation in eastern Ukraine served as both a test of Russia's armed forces and an opportunity for its propagandists. Ideologues, political handlers, managers, and propaganda agents began experimenting with tools and methods for conducting total information warfare. Despite

undeniable evidence and contrary to the most compelling proof of Russia's involvement in combat operations in Donbas, it is denied²⁵⁹. In response to accusations of Russian military equipment and servicemen's involvement in the downing of the civilian Boeing 777 flight MH17 over Ukrainian airspace, the Kremlin places blame for the tragedy on Ukrainian armed forces and puts forward several conflicting versions supposedly confirming this²⁶⁰. Sarah Firth, a correspondent for Russia Today (RT), resigned in protest against the «most disgusting and shocking disinformation» disseminated by the company regarding this crime, stating, «*The main rule of RT's work is always to blame Ukraine.*»²⁶¹

Russian propaganda compared Ukraine to a Nazi state²⁶² and was focused on dehumanizing Ukrainian servicemen, attributing extraordinary cruelty and the espousal of fascist ideas to them. Hostile language was actively employed in the mass media, gradually acclimating Russians to using expressions like «fascist junta,» «punishers,» «nazis,» and «nazi scum» when referring to Ukrainians. Television produced and disseminated fake stories about Ukrainian soldiers mistreating civilians²⁶³, which described incidents such as the «crucified boy,»²⁶⁴ «*slaves for Ukrainian soldiers,*»²⁶⁵ and the «*execution of a 12-year-old boy for wearing a George ribbon,*»²⁶⁶ among others. Old footage from Russian crime chronicles was used to create these fakes,²⁶⁷ and fake personas posing as «Donbas residents» were invited to reenact Russian narratives²⁶⁸. Between 2014 and 2017, the StopFake project debunked over 1,000 fake news stories about Ukraine, with «*every ninth piece containing false information about Ukrainian military actions to create a criminal image of the Ukrainian armed forces and delegitimize them.*»²⁶⁹ The stoking of hostility towards the Ukrainian army reinforced the anticipation of war in Russian society, making it appear closer and even necessary – accumulated aggression requires an outlet in the form of violence.

The preaching of the idea of the so-called «Russian world» ceased to be solely the concern of philosophers and became an integral part of Moscow's public policy. In the updated interpretation, the concept of the «Russian world» not only emphasizes the existence of a separate Russian-speaking Orthodox civilization but also grants Russia the right to «protect» Russian-speaking people regardless of their country of residence. Putin asserts, «*Russia's borders do not end anywhere.*»²⁷⁰ He referred to the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine as «Novorossiia» or «New Russia» and called for everything to be done to help the people of Donbas «*determine their own destiny independently.*»²⁷¹

Politicians, officials, art figures, and so-called «opinion leaders» considered it their duty to undertake a «pilgrimage to Donbas» and, upon their return, insisted, «*The people of Donbas dream of returning to the bosom of Mother Russia. They are dying for our country.*» During the presentation of his new film in Donetsk, People's Artist of Russia Porechenkov visited the conflict zone and, on camera, fired a heavy machine gun at Ukrainian positions, despite a ceasefire being in place at the time. He assured the fighters, saying, «*In Russia, there are many people with you.*»²⁷².

The propaganda campaign worked – thousands of Russian volunteers traveled to eastern Ukraine to «fight the Nazis.» The thesis: «*These Ukrainian pagans with swastikas will not stop. If we don't crush them here, they will come to us*» became the ideological justification for participating in a war in a foreign country in addition to the narrative of «*defending the people of Donbas from Kyiv coupists.*»²⁷³

«*The success of the disinformation war is unprecedented. The Putin regime has managed to create in people their own perception of the world, which has nothing to do with reality. The information special forces have achieved a more impressive victory than the GRU (Chief Intelligence Office) special forces that occupied Crimea,*» said former Putin advisor

Andrey Illarionov. «The day has come when we all recognized that words, cameras, photographs, the internet, and information, in general, have become another form of weapons, another type of armed forces,» said Russian Defense Minister Shoigu²⁷⁴.

5.5. «SYRIA, MY SISTER»

In September 2015, Russia announced the beginning of a military operation in Syria, which Russian citizens saw as a logical continuation of the annexation of Crimea – a triumphant war without significant losses. The Russian army focused on conducting spectacular missile and air strikes, the demonstration of which, through television, created a sense of a computer game among the audience.

Civilian cities, civilian objects, refugee camps, and humanitarian convoys came under attack, but the Kremlin, in its traditional style, dismissed all accusations, claiming to only target concentrations of Islamic terrorists. The German newspaper Bild wrote, «It has become clear that President Vladimir Putin is one of the biggest war criminals in Syria.»²⁷⁵. «We are defending ourselves. We are protecting the Russian people from the threat of terrorism. It's better to do it abroad than inside the country,» explained Russian Prime Minister Medvedev to his compatriots²⁷⁶. In January 2016, 53% of Russians were convinced that the bombings were necessary to prevent the military actions of Islamic radicals in Russia, and 24% believed that the bombings were a means to prevent «color revolutions» that the United States provokes around the world.

The Kremlin considered the war in Syria as a training ground for Russian servicemen. «It's hard to imagine better training. In principle, we can train there for quite a long time without significant damage to our budget,» Putin said at a press conference for Russian and foreign media²⁷⁷. «During the operation,

231 samples of modern and upgraded weapons were tested. Over 63,000 Russian servicemen, including 26,000 officers and 434 generals, gained experience in Syria,» Defense Minister Shoigu shared details with the public, calling the war «combat practice» for Russian soldiers²⁷⁸. One of the tasks was to show Russian citizens that their army is capable of even more significant victories.

The Russian Orthodox Church called the war in Syria a «sacred fight against terrorism.» «It corresponds to the mentality of our people and the special role that our country has always played in the Middle East,» explained the position of the Russian Orthodox Church by the head of the department for church and society relations, Archpriest Chaplin²⁷⁹.

3According to a poll conducted in October 2015, Putin's approval rating set another record - 89.9% of Russian citizens approve of the president's actions²⁸⁰. Despite the prevalence in the mass media of videos and photo evidence of numerous civilian casualties, Russian citizens did not believe it - only 22% believed that the information corresponds to reality²⁸¹. Only 27% of those surveyed are against the devastating bombings of Syrian cities²⁸².

In the Russian segment of the Internet, the song «Syria, My Sister, Your Russian Brother Will Protect You»²⁸³ was gaining popularity. «He died heroically defending our Motherland from the onslaught of insane barbarians on distant frontiers,» wrote an eulogy for a mercenary killed in combat in the vicinity of Deir ez-Zor in eastern Syria²⁸⁴. «Damascus is ours! We await the USSR-2!» expresses the sentiments of Russians, four-time world powerlifting champion Naumova, in her blog on the popular website «Echo of Moscow.»²⁸⁵.

5.6. «WISHING FOR PEACE – PREPARE FOR WAR»

Pro-government politicians and ideologists were increasingly shaping distorted perceptions of Ukraine within Russian society, denying its foreign policy sovereignty and the distinctiveness of the Ukrainian nation. At the International Valdai Discussion Club meeting in October 2014, Putin referred to Ukraine as a «*complex composite state*,»²⁸⁶ while Russian propaganda portrayed Ukraine as a country without historical roots and its own past, allegedly crafted by former empires to serve their political interests. This narrative formed a further vision: «*Ukraine is still under external control and is used by the West to weaken Russia.*» At the same time, Russians are advised on the method of returning Ukrainians to the «Russian fold» - through war and repression.

«There is no Ukraine. There is Ukrainianism. It's a specific disorder of the mind. An obsession with ethnography taken to the extreme. Such bloody local lore. Chaos instead of a state. Borscht, Bandera, and bandura exist, but there is no nation. Pushing them into brotherly relations by force is the only method that has historically proven effective in the Ukrainian direction. I don't think any other will be invented.» (Assistant to the President of Russia Surkov, the ideologue of the «Novorossiya» project and coordinator of the activities of armed separatist formations so-called «DNR» and «LNR»).



«We need to relocate half of Ukraine beyond the Urals, that's 15 million people, just what we need there. This is how we need to act, this is the only way they understand. By force, harshly, so that 'Novorossiya' returns to Russia, and Galicia with Lviv goes

away forever. And there will be a small state, and the word 'Ukraine' will cease to exist.» (MP and leader of the LDPR faction in the State Duma of Russia)²⁸⁸.

«We need to annex Ukraine to our country; it's our territory. If I were tasked with 'solving the issue,' I would have done it a long time ago.» (Head of Chechnya Kadyrov).²⁸⁹.

The Kremlin specified and outlined its territorial claims, justifying their «justice» through selective manipulation of historical facts. *«Let me remind you what Novorossiya is. It's Kharkiv, Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson, Mykolaiv, Odessa. They were not part of Ukraine during the tsarist times. These territories were transferred to Ukraine by the Soviet government. Why they did it - only God knows,»* Putin states²⁹⁰. The theory of «Novorossiya» voiced by him not only emboldened separatists and provided an additional impetus to the war in Donbas but also inspired the entire Russian society, which, after the annexation of Crimea, tasted the flavor of imperial greatness and liked it. The term «Novorossiya» was picked up and constantly promoted by Russian propaganda so that in the minds of Russians, Ukraine is perceived not as a unified state but as «Ukraine and Novorossiya.» This differentiation was deliberately reinforced in Kremlin-controlled news resources - if the word «Novorossiya» appeared in reports by RIA Novosti and ITAR-TASS two or three times before, after that, it appeared more than 50 times a day. *«It is essential to reintroduce the concept of 'Novorossiya' into the public space and rekindle interest in what was happening two centuries ago in the Russian Empire,»* insisted Fadiev, the director of the Public Project Institute of Russia²⁹¹.

Powerful anti-Ukrainian propaganda adeptly combined with equally aggressive anti-Western sentiment. To bolster Ukraine-phobic and militaristic sentiments in Russian society, Ukraine was portrayed as one of the most dangerous enemies of the Russians. The propaganda machine promotes the theme that *«with Ukraine's help, the collective West aims to destroy*

Russia.» «Ukraine remains an anti-Russian instrument in the hands of the American establishment and will likely bring numerous problems to Russia,» expressed the consensus of a member of the Council for Interethnic Relations under the Russian President²⁹².

«They really wished there was no Russia at all. As a country. Because we possess vast wealth,» explained the Secretary of Russia's National Security Council, Patrushev,²⁹³ citing a supposed statement by former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright: «It is unfair that the colossal natural wealth of Siberia belongs to Russia alone.» This fake quote, presented as evidence of the aggressive intentions of the «Washington establishment,» was regularly mentioned by experts in mass media. Putin,²⁹⁴ Deputy Prime Minister of Russia Rogozin,²⁹⁵ and the Chairman of the State Duma Committee on International Affairs Pushkov²⁹⁶ have all referred to this fabricated statement by American politicians, making it another form of propagandistic falsehood. For instance, at an exhibition in St. Petersburg titled «Only Together! Only Forward!» organizers displayed a made-up quote attributed to Democratic Party Congressman Jamie Raskin: «Russia is an Orthodox country with traditional social values. That's why it must be destroyed, regardless of the cost to the United States.»²⁹⁷

An opinion poll conducted in May 2015 revealed that 73% of Russians had a «very negative» or «mostly negative» view of the United States, and 59% had a similar view of the European Union²⁹⁸. *«We don't trust you in any way. You must understand that we are smarter, stronger, and more determined. Russia will never again fight on its own territory, and in case of danger, will strike at Western countries,» explained the new Kremlin policy to Spiegel magazine by Karaganov, a political scientist, dean of the Faculty of World Politics at the Higher School of Economics, and honorary chairman of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy of the Russian Presidential Administration²⁹⁹.*

In addition to the mention of the greatness of the «tsarist Russian Empire,» propaganda was increasingly turning to the theme of the «mighty Soviet Union,» blaming «Western forces» for its collapse once again. «*Those who don't regret the collapse of the USSR have no heart,*» Putin stated, and nostalgia for the «*state that everyone feared and respected*» became one of the tools for influencing propaganda on numerous representatives of the «Soviet generation» in Russia and abroad. Efforts were not in vain. Public opinion polls have shown that since 2014, the feeling of nostalgia for the USSR in Russian society has been growing year by year. In 2014, 54% of respondents lamented the collapse of the USSR, according to the Levada Center, while in 2021, this number significantly increased to 63%³⁰⁰. «*People have lost a sense of belonging to a great state*» is one of the main reasons cited by Russians to explain their dissatisfaction with the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Ukraine, which categorically rejected the Soviet legacy at the state level, became, at the Kremlin's prompting, the embodiment of an enemy that obstructs Russia's desire for the «unification of brotherly Slavic nations» and prevents the restoration of a «bright common past.» And since the image of the «Soviet's enemy» was primarily equated with fascism and nazism, Russian citizens were once again pushed towards the conclusion that «fascist» rule prevailed in Ukraine and that war with such a «long-standing adversary» was inevitable because, for Russia, «defeating fascism» is a matter of honor.

The mixture of whimsical ideas promoted by Russian politicians infected the nation with absurd beliefs, unfounded hopes, and false fears. Militarism propaganda in Russia reached another stage – «If you want peace, prepare for war.»

«The Kremlin allocates \$1.4 billion annually for the operation of its propaganda machine, both domestically and abroad,» stated Benjamin Ziff, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, during a 2015 hearing in the

U.S. Senate³⁰¹. According to the Center for Military-Political Research, the Russian Federation spends at least \$3.5 billion annually on the full spectrum of information warfare tools³⁰².

Television served as the primary weapon of disinformation, playing a significant role in shaping the worldview of Russians - 63% of the Russian population receives news from television, and 50% trust it more than any other source of information³⁰³. Ukrainian topics dominated the television agenda, presenting only one official perspective, which boiled down to two judgments: «Russians and Russian speakers suffer oppression and persecution in Ukraine» and «Russia has a duty to protect them.» All available resources, from analytical to entertainment programs, were engaged in transforming reality into media reality. Political talk shows, in particular, were highly popular, where pro-Kremlin experts manipulated the consciousness of the viewers and, seemingly engaging in debate, demonstrated the insidiousness of the West and the hostility of Ukraine. In 2014, Russian federal channels discussed the «Ukrainian issue» about 6,000 times per month, including 2,600 mentions of the war in Donbas³⁰⁴. Analysis of search queries on Yandex and Google revealed that the infamous propagandist show «Večer s Vladimirom Solovyovym» («Evening with Vladimir Solovyov») on the channel «Russia-1» has become the most popular source of information about the war in Ukraine among Russians³⁰⁵. The author of this show gained notoriety for his hatred towards Ukraine.

Propaganda targeted all age groups and social strata of society. Educational and cultural institutions, as well as religious ceremonies, become centers of influence. In Russian preschools, a tradition has emerged to dress children in military uniforms on May 9th and organize «Victory Parades» for them³⁰⁶. A video clip was created by Russian State Duma deputy Anna Kuvychko, in which young students in military attire sing about intentions to «return Alaska to the harbor of the

Motherland» and their readiness to go into the «final battle» at Putin's command³⁰⁷.

According to the Russian Ministry of Defense, there were over 5,500 military-patriotic clubs for youth in the country, and in 2015, the number of young people willing to enroll in military universities doubled³⁰⁸. In 2016, Russia established the «Yunarmiya» youth military-patriotic movement, whose goal is to «instill readiness and practical ability for military service» in young people. In 2022, the movement united over 1.4 million children and teenagers across the country, with regional branches in 89 regions of Russia³⁰⁹. The EU Council recognizes «Yunarmiya» as a semi-military organization and includes it in its sanctions list for spreading war propaganda³¹⁰.

With state support, the pro-Kremlin motorcycle club «Night Wolves,» whose members were involved in the fighting in Donbas, organized patriotic military shows called «The Fifth Empire» in occupied Crimea, involving military personnel and military equipment. The shows used church altars, Soviet symbolism, flags of the so-called «L/DNR» republics, and portraits of Stalin. The organizers explained, «*The Fifth Empire is what we are building today. In people who see the show, imperial consciousness awakens.*»³¹¹

In 2020, the Main Orthodox Church of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation was inaugurated in the Moscow region³¹². The church was adorned with mosaic panels dedicated to the annexation of Crimea, the Soviet army's participation in World War II, the military Victory Parade, and more.³¹³. Military-patriotic youth clubs were established alongside parish Sunday schools³¹⁴.

To shape a belligerent worldview among Russians, the government leveraged mass culture. Ideologists of war understood that one of the most important tools for shaping historical perceptions about past and present events in society was cinema. Cinema has a profound emotional impact on a vast

audience and is no less effective than information-analytical programs. In February 2015, the Russian Ministry of Culture approved «Military Glory of Russia: Victories and Victors» as a priority for financial support in filmmaking³¹⁵. With state support, Russian cinema produced films and series on military topics that glorified Russian soldiers and often disregarded the factual accuracy of historical events. On Russian screens, the Soviet myth of the great patriotic war was rebooted, presenting not facts but ideological directives. These presentations of history, packaged for entertainment, served to align with government proclamations.

In 2014, the screening of the film «The Match» was banned in Ukraine, as it portrayed Ukrainians as traitors and collaborators of the German fascists. Notably, one of the film's screenwriters and producers was Russian political technologist Timofey Sergeyev, the author of the article «What Russia should do with Ukraine,» which called for the destruction of Ukrainian identity.

The accuracy of events depicted in the war blockbuster «28 Panfilovtsy» was disputed even by Russian historians. In response to accusations of manipulating historical facts in the film, Russian Minister of Culture Medinsky referred to cinema as one of the «chief myth-makers of our time» and stated that «*positive myths about the feats of our ancestors can forgive errors and inaccuracies*»³¹⁶. He concluded, «*Even if there was nothing, it's a sacred legend that you simply cannot touch. And people who do so are complete scoundrels.*»³¹⁷ According to the All-Russian Center for the Study of Public Opinion, Russians recognized the film as the best of 2016³¹⁸.

«War films» continued to enjoy unwavering popularity among viewers, with 77% of Russians considering war-themed movies their favorite film genre,³¹⁹ and 60% indicating that they obtain knowledge about the past from movies.³²⁰

A separate branch of militaristic propaganda consisted of war films that justified the annexation of Crimea and Russian

aggression in Donbas. Although these films claim to be based on «real events,» they were, in fact, pure propaganda works that distorted facts, manipulated cause-and-effect relationships, and directly depicted Ukrainians as nazis and inhuman. These films reminded viewers that their «war against fascism» was not yet over, but the time would come when they would end it. The pompous film «Crimea» (with a total budget of 550 million rubles) was produced at the initiative of Russian Defense Minister Shoigu,³²¹ and the sponsor of the film «Sunburn» about the war in Donbas was the owner of the «Wagner» group, Prigozhin.³²²

In Russia, there was a boom in the publication of books in the genre of «alternative history.»³²³ Narratives where the main character either fought against NATO soldiers who had cunningly captured Russia in the future or traveled to the past to prevent the collapse of the USSR were particularly popular.

«These plans were brewing for decades. Finally, the moment has come - the NATO coalition attacked Russia. From the air, land, and sea, a sea of fire rained down on peaceful Russians. Eighty large and small cities in Russia were wiped off the face of the earth. The executioners poisoned the gas of local residents and refugees hiding in the forests. But not all Russians perished or submitted to the new order. Two private security guards, a long-distance trucker, and a group of airsoft enthusiasts challenged the enemy. They went into the woods to wage guerrilla warfare. All they want is to settle the score with the enemy, which is sowing death on their native land»

(annotation to the book by Alexey Kolyentyev, «The Main Opponent»)³²⁴.

«Scoundrels-gastarbeiters (gastarbeiters - the derogatory term widely used in Russia to refer to foreign workers from post-USSR or third-world countries) beat up our

contemporary. He loses consciousness and wakes up... in June 1941 in the body of his 16-year-old grandfather. How will he survive in Western Ukraine, which welcomed the Germans with bread and salt? Will his combat experience in Transnistria and Yugoslavia help him in the partisan war against Germans and Ukrainian nazis? Will the 'stranger' manage to change the course of history?»

(annotation to the book by Oleksiy Makhrov, «This is My War!»).³²⁵

«With the help of the 'peacekeeping contingent' of NATO, under the cover of American aviation and armored vehicles, Western Ukrainian executioners with a trident on their shoulder straps begin to exterminate the Russian-speaking population, erasing entire cities from the earth. Russia assists the resistance fighters with modern weapons, volunteers, and military advisers. They will break the damned Banderite trident! They will show the NATO 'hawks' their place! This is our last and decisive battle!»

(annotation to the book by Georgiy Savitsky, «The Battlefield is Ukraine. Broken Trident»)³²⁶.

A significant part of Russia's cultural life consisted of numerous concerts with military-patriotic performances. Propagandistic songs promoting the Kremlin's narratives of Russian greatness and resilience created an atmosphere of «readiness for new victories» in society.

«Russia - in this word, there is fire and strength. Our traditions are sacred, and a thousand years of chronicles of our victories will continue,» sang People's Artist of Russia Gazmanov in the song «Forward, Russia.» The song has acquired the status of the «national anthem of the Russian Federation.» It was played during army marches, broadcast on radio and television, and was a mandatory part of concerts during national holidays. The music video for the song, released in early 2021, has already garnered 12 million views on the author's YouTube channel³²⁷.

The song «Anthem of Polite People,» performed by the Academic Ensemble of Song and Dance of the Russian Army, has also become a widely recognized hit in Russia. «*Our ancestors call us forward, new victories await us,*» assured the song's author, the head of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation's Culture Department, Gubankov. In 2016, the main ensemble (64 people) perished in an airplane crash during a flight to the Syrian city of Aleppo, where the artists were scheduled to perform for the Russian military contingent in Syria³²⁸.

Alongside the rise in militarism, society's perception of its significance has changed as well. Over 25 years (from April 1992 to November 2017), the number of respondents who believed «Russians are a great nation with a special significance in world history» increased from 13% to 64%. Conversely, the opinion that «the Russian people are just like any other» decreased from 80% to 32%. If in the mid-1990s, less than a third of Russians referred to Russia as a «great power,» after the events in Crimea and the confrontation with the West, in 2017-2018, over 70% of the population held this belief. Russians have been increasingly proud of their military strength and confident that the army can defend the country – in 2005, 52% of citizens believed this, while in 2018, it rose to 88%³²⁹.

5.7. OUTPOST ABROAD

The Kremlin paid particular attention to the expansion of the «Russian world» and the discrediting of Ukraine abroad. 34% of the government's total spending on the media is allocated to international media operations. In 2015, state funding for the «Russia Today» television company, the main mouthpiece of Russian propaganda abroad, increased by more than 50% to 20.8 billion rubles (approximately 300 million dollars).³³⁰

For foreign audiences, Ukrainians' desire to preserve their identity was presented as aggressive nationalism, while the

war unleashed by Russia in eastern Ukraine was portrayed as an internal conflict in which Russian-speaking residents supposedly defended their rights and interests from the «Kyiv junta.» Consumers of this propaganda include not only foreigners but also representatives of the Russian-speaking diaspora, especially those from former Soviet countries and Russian emigrants. Moscow did not hide the fact that they are considered part of the «soft power» in the ideological confrontation with the «collective West» and a tool for expanding the boundaries of the «Russian world.»³³¹

At the behest of pro-Kremlin political technologists, Ukraine was used as an illustrative example of the threat to Russian-speaking minorities in other countries, with an emphasis on the idea that only Russia can protect them. Playing on feelings of nostalgia and idealizing life in the Soviet Union, propagandists promoted the idea of the necessity of restoring its analog in a new format under Russia's leadership. According to them, Ukraine stood in the way of this process.

With the support of Russian diplomatic institutions, pro-Russian activist groups quickly formed and actively operated in European and former Soviet countries. Through their public actions, they demonstrated support for the Kremlin's aggressive policies and sought to influence the West's stance on the war in Ukraine. The network of representations of «Rossotrudnichestvo» («Russian Cooperation,» so-called «Russian Houses») that includes 80 countries and has a staff of 600 people abroad, funded from the state budget, joined the campaign to spread militarist propaganda.³³² They became outposts of the «Russian world» abroad and, under the guise of «cultural diplomacy,» promoted pseudo-historical anti-Ukrainian myths, justified Russia's military invasion of Ukraine,³³³ and supported the integration of the occupied Ukrainian territories into the Russian space³³⁴.

Support for Russia's actions in foreign countries involved propagandistic car rallies,³³⁵ public campaigns against

«neo-nazism in Ukraine,»³³⁶ annual events like the «Immortal Regiment» march and Victory Day celebrations.³³⁷ The historical date of Victory Day has been transformed into an additional reason to demonstrate support for Moscow's modern policies. «*We felt your solidarity during the reunification of Crimea with Russia,*» Putin thanked the diaspora at the V World Congress of Russian Compatriots, which gathered over 400 participants from 97 countries³³⁸.

Unfortunately, European politicians and governments did not immediately realize all the risks and threats of the rapid transformation of the worldview of the Russian diaspora, and until February 2022, they hardly resisted Kremlin information diversions. Soon, a significant portion of Russians abroad welcomed a full-scale invasion of Ukraine and approved of brutal methods of waging war³³⁹.

In April 2022, in Berlin, the Russian community in Germany (the largest in Europe, with about 4.5 million residents in the country speaking Russian, 230,000 of them with Russian citizenship) held a car rally in support of Putin's actions. A column of several hundred cars passed through the entire city, with participants waving Russian and Soviet flags, playing Russian songs at full volume, and shouting insults at Ukrainian refugees. The action caused public outrage, and German media called it the «shameful car rally,» which took place just before the world learned of the tragedy in Bucha. Later, it became known that the organizers of the car rally had connections to the Russian diplomatic mission³⁴⁰.

«*Vladimir Vladimirovich, they [Ukrainians] didn't have enough over there. Here in Dresden, we can also strike back properly once,*» commented a Russian woman living in Germany on the peaceful protest of Ukrainian refugees against the mass shelling of Ukrainian cities³⁴¹.

In May 2023, it was revealed that the «Russian House» in Denmark, officially considered a center for science and

culture, had served as a cover for Russian intelligence for many years³⁴².

5.8. «CULT OF GRATITUDE» TO PUTIN

Simultaneously with the spread of militaristic and imperialistic sentiments, the idea of authoritarianism as the most effective way of governing the country and ensuring military victories was intensively imposed on Russian society. Russia's historical successes in the past were linked to the image of its leader, who symbolized the strength and power of the state at different stages of its development. According to surveys conducted in 2012, 2017, and 2021, Russians recognized Stalin as the most outstanding figure of all times and nations. «Bring back Stalin to the square and the streets – he led the country and the people into battle. Let's straighten our shoulders and stop slouching – with Stalin, we won the war! And if we need to do it again, we'll crush the bastards, we have the courage for it,» Russians sang in 2015. The song «Bring Back Stalin» has gained 3.2 million views on just one YouTube channel³⁴³. It is also noteworthy that in each survey, respondents included only three foreign figures in the «top twenty outstanding world figures,» including Napoleon I and Hitler.³⁴⁴

After the annexation of Crimea, the media promotes the image of Putin as a visionary and talented supreme commander-in-chief, a «genius strategist,»³⁴⁵ a «master of geopolitical chess,»³⁴⁶ and a politician who «outplayed everyone again.»^{347 348}

Historical comparisons like «Stalin won the war, Putin regained Crimea» were perceived by the population as evidence of the effectiveness of the «strong hand» in power. Following the analogy with the cult of personality of Stalin, a «cult of gratitude»³⁴⁹ to Putin was forming in society – streets were named after him,³⁵⁰ monuments were erected in his honor,³⁵¹ praising

songs,³⁵² documentaries, and art exhibitions are dedicated to him³⁵³. Icons³⁵⁴ and busts³⁵⁵, of Putin appear on the market, as well as a brand of vodka called «Putinka.»³⁵⁶.

«On the occasion of the President of Russia's birthday, solemn events take place throughout the country: people attend rallies, hold exhibitions, create giant greeting cards, and participate in cycling events. The most massive rally dedicated to President Vladimir Putin's birthday is a mass march in the capital of Chechnya. The head of the republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, led a column of over 100,000 people. In honor of the holiday, participants dressed in the colors of the Russian and Chechen flags and marched through the streets of Grozny forming a 'living flag,'» reported the media³⁵⁷. In February 2021, a flash mob called «Putin, our President» took place throughout Russia – workers, officials, athletes, students dressed up in the style of the president, chanted slogans in his support, recorded this action on video, and shared it on the internet³⁵⁸.

The flattering statements of officials of all ranks about Putin became a mandatory ritual³⁵⁹. *«Putin is a gift from God. How can we not worship him as a human being? We must beg him, kneel down for him to rule the state,»* said the head of Chechnya, Kadyrov,³⁶⁰ and sometimes citizens did indeed kneel down, turning to Putin for help with their problems³⁶¹. *«There is no greater force in our country than the words of the president,»* explains Russian senator Klishas, chairman of the Federation Council's committee on constitutional law, in an interview³⁶². *«If there is Putin, there is Russia; if there is no Putin, there is no Russia,»* voiced the key thesis for society the first deputy head of the presidential administration of the Russian Federation, Volodin³⁶³. *««There can only be one approach: one country, one president, one victory,»* paraphrased the well-known nazi motto Russian State Duma deputy Slutsky³⁶⁴.

Putin's foreign policy aligned with the expectations and aspirations of the masses. On the eve of a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, his activities were approved by 71% of Russian

citizens, and his rating only continued to rise³⁶⁵. Burdened by post-imperial complexes, Russians blindly believed their president's promises to return Russia to the status of a superpower, even though they understood that this could only be achieved through military aggression and the annexation of neighboring countries' territories. Compared to 2005, in August 2021, the level of trust among Russians in their armed forces tripled, reaching 61%³⁶⁶. The Russian population was confident in the invincibility of their army, which they proudly referred to as the «second army in the world.» Later, the highest level of support for the actions of Russian military forces in Ukraine (85%) was demonstrated by those who approved of the president's actions³⁶⁷.

In July 2021, Putin published an article on the Kremlin's website titled «*On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians*,»³⁶⁸ and in December, he declared a «US and NATO ultimatum.»³⁶⁹ It became clear: the decision has been made, and a full-scale war with Ukraine is only a matter of time.

5.9. FULL-SCALE INVASION

The military aggression demonstrated the effectiveness of Moscow's years-long propaganda campaign and the profound moral crisis it induced in Russian society. The treacherous invasion of Ukraine under the guise of a «special military operation» was met with approval or neutrality by the vast majority of Russians. In February 2022, only 23% of Russian citizens did not support the attack on their neighboring state.³⁷⁰ In the collective consciousness, the thrill of war and the temptation of quick military victory have overcome humanity and justice.

The effectiveness of propaganda was ensured by countering counter-propaganda efficiently. To further manipulate their own people, the Russian government transformed the country into a «media enclave.» The publication of information

that contradicts official state positions was prohibited,³⁷¹ and media controlled by the government were given a monopoly on shaping the narrative about the situation in Ukraine. Amendments to the Criminal Code introduced penalties of up to 15 years of imprisonment for disseminating «false information» about the Russian army. From February 24, 2022, Roskomnadzor blocked access to 206 thousand websites,³⁷² pushing at least 150 journalists out of Russia in just the first two weeks of the war³⁷³. In March 2022, Meta Platforms was declared an extremist organization in Russia³⁷⁴, leading to the blocking of access to Instagram and Facebook.

Moscow understood the importance of not just military but also informational «*blitzkrieg*.» In January-March 2022, the federal budget allocated 17.4 billion rubles to state mass media, which is 3.2 times more than for the same period the previous year³⁷⁵.

In the absence of competition and alternative expressions in the information space, pro-Kremlin propaganda, justifying aggression, became total and demonstrated an unprecedented level of deceit not seen since 2014. The permitted threshold of cynicism in lying was set by Russia's Foreign Minister Lavrov, who declared at a press conference in Antalya: «*We did not attack Ukraine.*»³⁷⁶ Denying aggression against Ukraine in the face of clear events became a characteristic feature of propaganda campaigns, especially popular references to pseudo-historical facts. «*We don't want to fight anyone. Russia has never attacked anyone. It's even strange that such a large and powerful country has never attacked anyone; it only defended its borders,*» taught Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church during a sermon at the Kremlin's Archangel Cathedral in May 2022.³⁷⁷ «*Why do they hate us so much? Why? We haven't waged conquering wars; we haven't enslaved anyone; we haven't threatened anyone. If we have episodes of cruelty in our history, it's because we were defending ourselves,*»

propagandist Simonyan was convincing the audience on the federal TV channel «Russia-1» after a year of war in Ukraine.³⁷⁸

Official press releases from the Russian Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as official statements by government representatives, served as guides for interpreting events on the occupied territories in mass media. They assured Russians of Russia's good intentions toward Ukrainians. The Department of Communications of the Armed Forces and mass media informed Russians about their army's stunning successes, emphasizing the rapid advance of troops in Ukraine, exaggerating the number of controlled settlements, and denying the presence of combat losses among personnel. In June 2022, the Russian independent publication «Project» published the results of an investigation that exposed the Russian Ministry of Defense's lies about supposed victories achieved in Ukraine³⁷⁹. The phrase «no losses»³⁸⁰ by military spokespersons became an internet meme and spread as a label for the obvious and shameless deception about the course of the war in Ukraine.

From the first weeks of the invasion, the propaganda machine churned out sentimental stories about the «*humanitarian mission of the Russian soldier*»³⁸¹. The most popular were staged plots about distributing food to the civilian population, displays of concern for children and pensioners, and interviews with «liberated from nazism» residents of Ukraine who cried on camera, described their «suffering under the Kyiv regime», and thanked Russian servicemen for liberation³⁸². The Russian audience was being persuaded that the occupation of Ukraine was necessary, morally justified, and not a full-fledged war or a tragedy for the Ukrainian people.

With the support of the Ministry of Education, the State «Institute of Education» conducted an all-Russian open video lesson called «Defenders of the World.» Students in grades 6-11 were explained that the «*liberating mission in Ukraine is necessary*», «*in two to three years, we would have had to repel an attack on our country from Ukrainian territory*», «we

don't attack residential buildings, we don't harm civilians,» «we compel Ukraine to peace.» The open lesson was viewed by over five million viewers³⁸³.

To garner public support for the war, the government engaged representatives of the country's intellectual elite. Over 150 cultural figures put their signatures on an open letter to the President of Russia justifying the military aggression against Ukraine³⁸⁴. Appeals to the Russian people in favor of the «special operation» were published by the «Union of Rectors of Russia» (signed by over 300 heads of higher education institutions)³⁸⁵ and the «Literary Newspaper» (signed by 500 writers and poets)³⁸⁶. These appeals shared a senseless yet soothing pro-government leitmotif:

«Did we have a choice? To watch as they tighten the noose around our necks by placing bases around our land or to finally say our decisive word? Bloodshed, brother killing brother—it's terrible, but the delay would be like death, like the destruction of our country»
(from the appeal by cultural figures).

«We are witnessing events that concern everyone. This is Russia's decision to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine and thereby protect itself from growing military threats. It is crucial in these days to support our army, which defends our security, and to support our President, who has made a long-awaited but necessary decision»
(from the rectors' appeal).

«The West has not stopped trying to harm Russia in one way or another, tarnish its image, and ultimately dismember it. So who really wants victims? Our troops, which have deliberately not killed a single civilian so far? The answer is clear. The West wants victims, the Banderloges

[derogatory term for Ukrainians] who have embraced NATO»

(from the appeal by writer).

To popularize the war, the letter «Z» is widely used, becoming an ideological symbol of loyalty to the government and its decision to invade Ukraine. Russia is gripped by the «Z-pandemic»: politicians and officials of all levels place the letter on their pages, it adorns building facades and public places, it is mass-applied to vehicles, store windows, and clothing items. Flash mobs involving «Z-shaping» of people take place all over Russia,³⁸⁷ on Easter, the letter «Z» is put in glaze on Easter cakes for blessing,³⁸⁸ and radical patriots draw the same symbol on the doors of war opponents' residences to intimidate them³⁸⁹.

5.10. BUCHA

In the spring of 2022, the name of a small Ukrainian town called Bucha appeared on the front pages of global media, becoming a symbol of the horrors of the Russian invasion. After the hasty withdrawal of the Russian army, over 1,400 bodies of tortured and killed local residents, including 37 children, were discovered in Bucha and the Bucha district³⁹⁰. Those who survived recounted the extreme cruelty of the occupiers - the occupation was accompanied by executions, sexual violence, torture, deprivation of liberty, looting, and the destruction of homes. Numerous photo and video materials, as well as investigations conducted with the participation of international experts, confirmed that Russian military personnel committed crimes against the civilian population.



However, the hope that the published information about the massacre in Bucha would trigger a reevaluation of the war in Russian society turned out to be in vain. The unexpected retreat of the Russian army from previously occupied territories did not sober Russians but became a humiliating blow to their



imperial self-esteem and a cause of increased resentment. While reports of the actions of U.S. soldiers in Vietnam led to outrage among the American people and sparked a wave of anti-war protests, images of brutally killed Ukrainians did not traumatize Russian society and did not change its aggressive attitudes. In April 2022, only 19% of Russian citizens condemned the actions of their army, which was less than at the beginning of the invasion³⁹¹. *«Bucha is not the face of the war in Ukraine. Bucha is the face of Russia. This is their real face. Their real attitude towards our people. The attitude towards Ukraine,»* said Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky³⁹².

The Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation called the obvious and indisputable evidence of the brutal behavior of Russian soldiers in Bucha *«a fabrication by the Kyiv regime for Western media»*³⁹³ and *«a fake created to justify sanctions against Russia.»*³⁹⁴ The leaders of the Russian military department asserted, *«During the time when this locality was under the control of Russian armed*

forces, no local residents suffered from any violent actions.»³⁹⁵ The Russian General Staff and the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation were entirely satisfied with such explanations. Criminal cases were initiated against those who disagreed with this, accusing them of spreading fake information about the Russian armed forces.³⁹⁶ In a meeting with the UN Secretary-General, Putin declared that the tragedy was a provocation «in which [Russian] army had no involvement.»³⁹⁷

To divert society's attention from the real facts and create an atmosphere of informational chaos around them, Russian propaganda disseminated several alternative versions of events in Bucha: «civilians were killed not by Russians but by Ukrainian servicemen,» «the bodies were brought to Bucha from elsewhere,» «the corpses in the videos were moving, so it was a staged act with actors,»³⁹⁸ «the bodies of the victims were mannequins.»³⁹⁹ Despite the illogicality of such explanations, they were perceived and widely discussed in Russian society, which tended to trust television lies rather than evidence. Once again, propaganda was focused on deception, exploiting the myth of the supposed humanity of the Russian warrior. «Do you have nightmares, or what? If Russia behaved like the Nazis, I wouldn't be here right now. Because I believe in God, and I cannot be on the side of injustice and cruelty,» assured Russian propagandist Simonyan on the «TVC channel», which was broadcast throughout the entire territory of Russia⁴⁰⁰.

Most Russian citizens did not burden themselves with the search for the truth. They were just repeating the propaganda's soothing mantra: «We are the descendants of liberators of Europe from Nazism. Our boys are not capable of such things.» Nearly half of Ukrainians had relatives or friends in Russia, and only in 13% of cases, during conversations with Ukrainians, did they condemn the actions of their government⁴⁰¹. Russians received information firsthand; they knew that their soldiers killed, raped, and tortured civilians, yet they

continued to support Putin. In August 2022, 60% of Russian citizens stated that they would approve of Putin's decision to launch a new offensive on Kyiv⁴⁰².

The propaganda's standard response to accusations of the Russian army's cruelty towards Ukrainians was the cliché «Where were you when they were bombing Donbas for 8 years?» as a reminder of civilian casualties in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in the earlier years of the war. In 2022, this phrase ranked third in terms of frequency of use in Russia (in the «Word of the Year» category of the Russian «Word of the Year» competition)⁴⁰³. Russians were bothered neither by

the apparent cynicism of such a statement, as it was Russia that ignited the war in Donbas, nor by the glaring disparity in civilian casualties. According to the Russian installed authorities in the region themselves, in 2021, throughout the entire territory of the so-called «DNR,» 7 civilians were killed, and in

2020 and 2019, 9 in each year⁴⁰⁴. Over the course of a year of full-scale war, the UN recorded 22,904 civilian casualties in Ukraine: 8,534 killed and 14,370 wounded (data as of April 17, 2023)⁴⁰⁵. The Prosecutor General's Office of Ukraine believes that the real number of victims of Russian aggression may be ten times higher than official figures⁴⁰⁶.

In April 2022, the 64th Motorized Rifle Brigade, implicated in the killing of Ukrainians in Bucha, was awarded the honorary title of «Guards» by a separate decree of the President of Russia⁴⁰⁷. Following the army, Russian society understood that the taboo on violence against the civilian population had been lifted, and brutality was equated with «*heroism and courage, resilience, and bravery.*»



5.11. WAR OF THE WORLDS

Despite the initial success of the Russians in the first weeks of the invasion, the Armed Forces of Ukraine managed to turn the situation on the frontlines, stop the aggressor, launch a counteroffensive, and liberate a significant portion of the occupied territories. The failure of the «blitzkrieg» plan, humiliating setbacks, and enormous battlefield losses became no longer concealable. Ukraine's successes on the battlefield dealt a devastating blow not only to the image of the Russian army but also to the geopolitical ambitions of the Kremlin. Big plans for constructing a «multipolar world» crumbled due to Ukraine's unwavering stance. The desperate resistance of the Ukrainian people and their unwillingness to live under Russia's protectorate within Putin's outlined «Russian civilization» provoked anger among Russians. Empathy for Ukraine and thoughts of a «fraternal nation» had become a thing of the past.

Responding to these changes, the Kremlin launched an information campaign to adapt Russian citizens to the new, unexpected realities. Propaganda focused on globalizing the goals and nature of the war. «*The Russian Federation is not at war with Ukraine, not with the Ukrainian Nazi regime. Our country is at war with 3.6 million NATO troops and a population of 800 million people who provide equipment, means of aggression, and money to the Kiev regime,*» explained the reasons for the Russian army's defeats Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council Medvedev⁴⁰⁸.

Mass media radically transformed public discourse. The «surgically precise» special operation to «*protect people in Donetsk and Luhansk regions*»⁴⁰⁹ from a «*gang of drug addicts and neo-nazis*»⁴¹⁰ has turned into a «*battle against the dictatorship of the USA and the collective West for a Greater Russia, for our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren's protection from subjugation.*»⁴¹¹ The propaganda

machine began constructing the myth of a «*new great patriotic war*» defending Russia's borders and «*Russian civilization*» as a whole. The aggressor was transformed into a victim, aggression was portrayed as a forced defense, and the war was sacralized under the slogan «*we are Russian - God is with us.*»⁴¹² Mass media, under the guidance of political technologists, propagated conspiracy theories justifying the invasion and conducting a predatory war on foreign soil: «*Putin preempted Ukraine's attack on Donbas for a day*»⁴¹³, «*The West was preparing an attack on Russia and Belarus from Ukraine*»⁴¹⁴, «*Ukraine sought to restore its nuclear potential*»⁴¹⁵, «*Under the guidance of the USA, Ukraine was developing biological weapons*»⁴¹⁶, «*Ukraine is a NATO springboard for aggression using nuclear weapons*»⁴¹⁷.

«*In 2022, the main topic of disinformation and manipulation in the global media space was Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine*», experts from the European Union's foreign service claim in a study. «*Ukraine and its representatives became direct targets of information attacks in 33 out of 100 cases, with the main aim in 60 out of 100 cases being to justify Russia's invasion*»⁴¹⁸.

The Kremlin understood that it was easier for society to hate a familiar enemy that had been cultivated for decades. This enemy was not only the servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine but the entire Ukrainian nation. «*3A significant part of the Ukrainian people is gripped by the madness of Nazism. Before this, I thought that there were not many of them in Ukraine, and I certainly couldn't have imagined that there were so many. This is the main force in today's Ukraine*», explained to the Russians the Kremlin's media manager, Simonyan⁴¹⁹.

Y In August 2022, near Moscow, the «*First Anti-Fascist Congress*» was held in the «*Patriot*» Park. It was attended by the Minister of Defense of the Russian Federation, members of the State Duma, clergymen of the Russian Orthodox Church, and artists. During an exhibition of trophy weapons open to

journalists, particular attention was paid to creating the image of a «*typical Ukrainian Bandera follower*» Ukrainian soldiers were depicted as mannequins covered in tattoos with swastikas, skulls, spiderwebs, and eagles. An exhibit was dedicated to the typical life of a «*Bandera follower,*» featuring fascist literature, slogans about NATO definitely helping Ukraine, and Munich sausages, which, according to the organizers, should evoke associations with Hitler's Germany.⁴²⁰

According to the analytical company «*Semantic Visions,*» after the invasion, nazism was mentioned in 10-20% of Russian articles about Ukraine. «*The key feature of Russian propaganda is its repetitiveness,*» said the head of the research and analysis department of the company. «You simply observe the constant repackaging of the same narrative over and over again. In this case, it means repeating baseless accusations of nazism among Ukrainians⁴²¹. These accusations were indeed groundless; in February 2022, more than 150 scientists from various institutes studying genocide and Nazism condemned such rhetoric from the Russian authorities regarding Ukraine and stated that it was not supported by facts.⁴²²

5.12. CHURCH BANNER UNDER THE RED FLAG

The Second World War became the cornerstone for constructing the system of ideological indoctrination of the masses. The aggression against Ukraine was presented as its inevitable and logical continuation. Drawing parallels, the authorities called on Russians to be worthy of their grandfathers' memory and to complete the «*historical mission of the Russian people so that nazism could never raise its head again, not only in Russia but anywhere in the world*»⁴²³. Russian soldiers-invaders participating in the modern war against Ukraine were equated with Soviet soldiers of 1945.

Propaganda immersed society in an atmosphere of a «heroic past,» resorting to the widespread use of fetishes that are familiar to Russians from Victory Day parades. In occupied towns, the occupation authorities pompously restored monuments from Soviet times⁴²⁴ and hoisted «red victory flags» on administrative buildings⁴²⁵. Myths about the heroic deeds of children⁴²⁶ and elderly people⁴²⁷ were created in the style of the USSR propaganda. Mass media imposed linguistic stamps of the Second World War era, justifying cruelty with phrases like «do not take prisoners,» «if the enemy does not surrender, they are destroyed,» «punishment according to the laws of war-time,» «execution on the spot without trial,» and so on.

On National Unity Day, former Russian President Medvedev, on behalf of the Kremlin, called to «stop the supreme ruler of hell»⁴²⁸ on the battlefield, and the Russian Orthodox Church mobilized for information warfare, broadcasting propaganda theses and encouraging bellicose zeal among the parishioners. Russian Patriarch Kirill stated, «*For eight years, attempts have been made to destroy what exists in Donbas. We have entered a struggle that has metaphysical, not physical, significance*»⁴²⁹.

The Russian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate declared pacifism to be heresy, «*incompatible with the teaching of the Orthodox Church,*» and urged not to interpret the commandment «*thou shalt not kill*» too literally⁴³⁰. In his appeals to the parishioners, Kirill accused the West of «*denying God,*» destroying Christian values, transferring power to Muslims, and closing churches. The head of the pro-Kremlin church emphasized the «*special historical path of Russia,*» calling on people to save it «*from the most powerful forces dominating most countries in the world today*» and to pray «*for our army, for the true Orthodox Christian Supreme Commander-in-Chief, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, as well as for all military leaders and those in power*»⁴³¹.

The chief military priest of the clergy, who cared for servicemen and law enforcement officers in the area of the «*special military operation*,»⁴³² was appointed Archpriest Dmitri (Dmitri Vasilenkov), a graduate of the Leningrad Higher Military-Political School named after Andropov⁴³³. «*This is a war against our Holy Rus people! We will prevail with God's help!*» he preached⁴³⁴. «*We are the last defenders of Christianity*,» proclaimed a well-known Russian TV host and top propagandist Solovyov, calling for the use of nuclear weapons and comparing its impact to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah⁴³⁵.

In the regions of Russia, a practice of publicly blessing soldiers⁴³⁶ and consecrating military equipment⁴³⁷, was introduced before their departure to the front. Mobilized individuals were given crosses,⁴³⁸ «*protection candles*,»⁴³⁹ and icons, sometimes with an image of Putin on them⁴⁴⁰. Patriarch Kirill called on Russians to boldly go to war and promised them forgiveness of all sins⁴⁴¹ and «*eternal life with God in His kingdom*» for dying in Ukraine⁴⁴².

The film «*War and the Bible*» was broadcast on the Orthodox channel «*Spas*,» which portrayed the war in Ukraine as a «*war against demons*» and attempted to justify it from a religious perspective. In the 16 episodes of the film, the main themes of state propaganda were repeated, including «*atrocities by Ukrainians*,» «*Ukrainian nazism*,» «*godless NATO countries*,» «*Russia's holy mission*,» «*God-given president*,» and «*Russian warrior-defenders*.» The film, filled with a spirit of militarism, openly encouraged believers to go and fight in Ukraine. Russian Orthodox Church hieromonk, Father Dionisy, a chaplain of one of the Russian army units, sang in the third episode, «*The Lord is my flag*,» stating, «*We will shoot, we will crush, we will cut, destroy, judge, execute, and conquer*»⁴⁴³.

In March 2022, the spokesman for the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) reported the murder of a priest by Russian soldiers near the town of Ivankiv in the Kyiv region where he was

performing a service. He was pulled out of his car and shot. He was wearing his cassock⁴⁴⁴.

On November 26, 2022, in a forest near the occupied town of Novaya Kakhovka on the left bank of the Kherson region, the deacon of the local Evangelical Christian Church and his 19-year-old son were shot by Russian servicemen⁴⁴⁵.

On June 13, 2023, as a result of shelling by Russian forces, Father Mykola Palahniuk, a priest of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and the head of the church, died at the Ioanno-Predtechensk Temple in the town of Bilozirka in the Kherson region. He was distributing humanitarian aid to people affected by the explosion of the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Station on the church's premises⁴⁴⁶.

«As a result of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, at least 494 religious buildings, spiritual institutions, and shrines have been completely destroyed, damaged, or looted by Russian servicemen,» according to the Ukrainian Institute for Religious Freedom⁴⁴⁷.

The spiritual leader of Orthodox Christians worldwide, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, has called on Patriarch Kirill to resign and not shame the Russian Church. *«The Russian Orthodox Church and the state leadership of Russia are cooperating in a criminal aggression and should share responsibility for the crimes committed,»* stated the Ecumenical Patriarch⁴⁴⁸.

Theologians from various countries around the world have concluded that the bellicose position of the Russian Church goes against the canons of Orthodoxy. In a special declaration, theologians condemned the war and deemed the concept of the *«Russian world» on which it is based as false and heretical»*⁴⁴⁹.

5.13. WAR CORRESPONDENTS AND THE CULTURAL FRONT

By 2022, Russia had substantial experience in manipulating public consciousness using so-called «*bot farms*» and «*troll factories*.» The most famous of them was the «*Priozhin's Olga Factory*,» which had been fueling animosity against Ukraine since April 2014. With the onset of full-scale invasion, the activity of anti-Ukrainian propaganda on the internet increased significantly, turning messengers and social media into powerful information weapons. Alongside Russian platforms like «*Vkontakte*» and «*Odnoklassniki*,» «*Telegram*» became the most convenient platform for propaganda. Its audience in Russia doubled during the war. In January 2022, it had 25.5 million daily users, and by May 2023, 51.2 million citizens were using «*Telegram*» (42% of the entire internet audience)⁴⁵⁰. On platforms like «*Vkontakte*» (where the son of the first deputy head of the Russian presidential administration acted as the CEO) and «*Telegram*,» dozens of channels were created to provide pro-Russian coverage of the «*special military operation*.» Some of these channels had over a million subscribers and hundreds of thousands of views. Russians' consciousness was filled with warlike calls from the authorities, untrue reports of Russian military successes on the front, and fabricated stories about nazis in the Ukrainian army and their atrocities.

«*Ukrainian soldiers wear the slogan 'Each to His Own' on their helmets as a sign of their support for neo-nazism*,» reported the Telegram channel «*News from Russia*» and published a photo of Ukrainian servicemen with this inscription on their helmets as evidence. A closer examination of the photo revealed that the writing had been added using image editing software. Later, the original photo was found online, and it was clear that there were no such inscriptions on Ukrainian soldiers' helmets⁴⁵¹.

Pro-Kremlin Telegram channels spread a fake video showing Ukrainian soldiers supposedly stopping a car with a woman and her child because she overtook a military column on the road. After that, the soldiers threatened the woman,

humiliated her, demanded that she not speak to them in Russian, damaged her vehicle, made the child cry, and, in the end, fired several shots at the car. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs even shared this video on the internet as an illustration of the existence of nazism in Ukraine. However, thanks to geolocation data, it was quickly determined that the footage was taken in a territory temporarily occupied by Russia⁴⁵². After the video's deceit was exposed, even Russian propagandists acknowledged its falsehood. «*The video is a fake. Our people are poorly trained. We have a lot to learn when it comes to conducting such information operations,*» admitted one of them⁴⁵³.

According to a person who worked in the media holding «*Patriot*» created by Yevgeny Prigozhin, most of the people portrayed as «*victims of the Ukrainian Armed Forces*» in the reports were hired actors. «*These characters repeated pre-learned lines, 'shedding tears.' They were directed by an operator behind the scenes, instructing them on how to tell the story – 'slower' or 'let's go over this moment again,'*» he explained⁴⁵⁴.

Russian officials were also involved in online war propaganda. «*Official accounts of Russian diplomatic missions on social media function as a coordinated network for spreading disinformation,*» said experts from the European Union's foreign policy service⁴⁵⁵.

However, «*voyenkory*» (war correspondents) have gained particular popularity in Russia. They used a method called «*reversed propaganda,*» combining reports of «*heroic frontline life*» with tales of the «*ugly truth,*» which gains the audience's trust⁴⁵⁶. The materials of these «*war correspondents*» were filled with hostile language and the display of cruelty, activating hatred toward Ukrainians as the source of Russian soldiers' suffering. Encouraging revenge was a typical technique of such channels. «*If we're destroying cities in the Donbas, can you imagine what will happen to Zelensky's hometown?*» «*In*

conquered territories, you need to behave as conquerors, not as guests. People love their masters,» wrote the «war correspondent» Sladkov.⁴⁵⁷ Перебуваючи поблизу лінії фронту, воєнкори не гребують створенням постановочних відеосюжетів, продукуванням провокаційних фейків і вкидів⁴⁵⁸. While near the front lines, these correspondents did not shy away from creating staged video stories, producing fakes and provocations.⁴⁵⁹ For example, the creator of the «WarGonzo» channel (with over 1.2 million subscribers on «Telegram») made a staged story about the destruction of Ukrainian drones⁴⁶⁰. A «war correspondent» from the pro-Kremlin newspaper «Komsomolskaya Pravda» reported on the alleged discovery of biological weapons in the basements of Mariupol⁴⁶¹. The Russian government carefully monitored and regulated the activities of these «war correspondents», and some of them even met personally with Putin, who called them the «real force.»

To influence mass consciousness, the Kremlin employed the entertainment industry and pro-government creative intelligentsia. In Russia, a «Z-culture» emerged that romanticized the bloody war in Ukraine, distorted its true goals, and spread myths about the heroism of the Russian army. Celebrated figures in this propaganda effort included popular rock and pop bands, actors, poets, and writers of various ages, allowing the propaganda to reach a wide range of consumers.

In April and May 2022, a patriotic concert marathon titled «*Za Rosiyu*» («*For Russia!*») took place in 31 Russian cities, featuring popular rock and pop bands, actors, poets, and writers. Nearly 100 million rubles were spent on this event, making it the most expensive state contract in Russia for a concert program⁴⁶². The concerts featured calls such as «*Victory is with us,*» «*We won't let the Western world bring us to our knees,*»

and «*Let's pray together for our soldiers who are cleansing Great Russia of filth,*» along with messages to «*cleanse the Augean stables of nazism that has spread worldwide.*» In June 2023, the Presidential Fund for Cultural Initiatives allocated two grants totaling 205 million rubles for «patriotic» music tours in support of the war⁴⁶³. Russian artists, such as singers Baskov and Leps, announced that they would reward 1 million rubles to any serviceman who destroys a Leopard tank and called on other artists to join this initiative. Baskov explained their motivation: «*We are at war with the Western world, which hates us, does not consider us a great nation, and wants to erase Russian culture and all Russians.*»⁴⁶⁴ The Russian federal channel «NTV» launched a show called «Stars Against Zelensky,» which has become a platform for denigrating the Ukrainian president and spreading propaganda through popular faces among the Russian public⁴⁶⁵.

In 2022, Russia saw the release of poetry collections titled «Resurrected in the Third World War,» «The Great Checkpoint,» and «Russian Summer PoeZiya (Poetry).» These collections featured recurring themes promoting the messianic role of Russia, the fight against NATO and Ukrainian fascism, and Russia's historical victories and liberating missions: «*Russia is a land of grace, and Russians are the will of Heaven,*» «*The fascists who once lost are now celebrating revenge in Ukraine,*» «*For eight years, a NATO corporal ruled here, selecting the best teenage girls.*»⁴⁶⁶. The promotion of this «Z-poetry» occurred through concerts, radio, and television broadcasts. In August 2022, the television channel «Russia Today (RT)» dedicated a documentary film titled «Cultural Front» to Z-literary figures.⁴⁶⁷

With the support of Russia's Ministry of Defense, the «Foundation for Support of Military-Patriotic Cinema» was established. According to the head of the ministry, Shoigu, the foundation aimed to provide assistance in producing films with military-patriotic themes, including those showcasing

the heroism of Russian soldiers during the special military operation⁴⁶⁸. *The Ministry of Culture of Russia published a list of priority themes for state financial support of film production in 2023, including themes such as «Neo-colonial policies of Anglo-Saxon countries. Degradation of Europe,» «Popularization of heroism and dedication of Russian soldiers during the special military operation,» and «Promotion of service in the Armed Forces of Russia. Unification of society in support of the army. Strengthening the status of the military profession through historical events and contemporary history,» and «Peacekeeping mission of Russia. Historical victories of Russia. The liberating mission of Soviet soldiers.»*⁴⁶⁹ In 2023, the Ministry of Culture allocated 11 billion rubles for the production of national films.

In August 2023, Russia premiered a full-length feature film titled «The Witness» in Russian cinemas, which can be considered an example of crude and primitive anti-Ukrainian propaganda. The film depicts a Belgian violin virtuoso on tour in Kyiv who witnesses the start of the war and ongoing crimes committed by «Ukrainian nazis.» Over two hours, the film visualizes all the Kremlin's propaganda clichés: Ukraine is preparing a treacherous attack on Donbas, and Russia only preempts it by a day; Kyiv is in chaos, with murders and looting; a person in camouflage with a nazi tattoo, under the influence of drugs, rapes and kills a musician's manager while singing a Ukrainian song; the walls of the Ukrainian military headquarters are adorned with a gilded Hitler profile, «Mein Kampf» is on the table, and soldiers wear T-shirts with Hitler's image; Ukrainian soldiers brutally beat and torture civilians with water and electric shocks for pleasure; «Azov» fighters, under the guise of an evacuation, lure townspeople into the train station, where a missile hits. Finally, Russian soldiers with St. George ribbons on their helmets rescue the musician, and in Europe, he decides to «stand up against the lies of Western media that tarnish the Russian army.» The film aims to convince viewers

of its truthfulness by presenting Ukrainian events through an «unbiased foreigner's» perspective.

To spread propaganda, Russia also used video games. For instance, in Minecraft, a battle for the city of Soledar in the Donetsk region, which was captured by occupiers in January 2023, was recreated. Phrases like «Glory to Russia» were featured in a video tutorial on how to build a flagpole with the Russian flag above an image of the city labeled «Luhansk.» Games and related platforms, such as Discord and Steam, have become online channels for Russian agitprop, disseminating propaganda among a predominantly young audience as the Kremlin tries to justify the war in Ukraine. According to Joseph Brown, an associate professor who taught game development in Russia for five years, he experienced the aggressiveness of Russian propaganda firsthand. «*They need to return everyone to war,*» the expert explains. «*It's another part of ongoing propaganda. In each separate environment through which they can reach you, they will reach you.*»⁴⁷⁰

The Institute for Internet Development, associated with the administration of the Russian president, planned to allocate a record 20.7 billion rubles in grants for the creation of «patriotic» content. This included the production of TV series, support for the blogosphere, multi-format projects, special projects in the media, and game development⁴⁷¹.

5.14. CHILDHOOD IN UNIFORM

The Kremlin is reprogramming society to support an exhaustive and protracted war, which can only be won through exceptional cruelty. «*This is a war for self-preservation. It's either them or us. The Ukrainian state must be completely destroyed. More precisely, not a trace of it should remain so that this abomination can never, under any circumstances, be reborn. If it takes years, even decades, so be it,*» said Deputy Chairman of the

Security Council of the Russian Federation, Medvedev, about the government's intentions. The prolonged conflict requires rejuvenating the mobilization resource. The Kremlin needs youth who will «love the Motherland, the president, and the war.» Militarism propaganda infiltrates the education system, and the upbringing of «patriots» is streamlined. Funny little child-soldiers will later become obedient warriors ready to execute any command, no matter how brutal, without hesitation or protest. The ruling elite understands that this is a matter of their personal safety and their future in power.

From the beginning of the war until June 2023, educational institutions - kindergartens, schools, and colleges - have organized 1.5 million various «military-patriotic» events, including nearly 200,000 dedicated to the war in Ukraine. Work is conducted with every age group, and preschool children participate in every sixth event⁴⁷².

As part of the all-Russian «Letter to a Soldier» campaign, children sent «victory letters» they've handwritten themselves to the front lines (by November 2022, over 170,000 had been sent).⁴⁷³ They also took part in patriotic gatherings and concerts where they marched, sang songs, or recited verses in support of the war⁴⁷⁴.



«Homeland, give me a weapon, put me in formation! I swear by my own Russian blood – my hand won't tremble,» recited a schoolchild in a military uniform on stage against a backdrop of portraits of Russian soldiers who died in Ukraine⁴⁷⁵.

In the spring of 2023, the Russian Ministry of Education organized an all-Russian event called «Talisman of Goodness.» Children crafted and sent toys and charms with prayers and

notes inside to soldiers: «Return undefeated.» In the first week of the campaign, the ministry reported that «*children created over 50,000 talismans for participants of the Special Military Operation.*»⁴⁷⁶.

With the start of the full-scale war, children in Chechnya's kindergartens and schools were mobilized to pray for the victory of the Russian army and Chechen military. «*Our fearless soldiers fight against the forces of evil and protect our religion from the machinations of the accursed Iblis,*» explained the head of Chechnya, Kadyrov, adding that all relevant institutions have joined the initiative⁴⁷⁷.

Preschoolers and students in lower grades were engaged in a military-sports game called «Little Star,» which had an entertaining character and popularized the soldier's profession. During the game, children memorized facts related to the Russian army, sang marching songs, overcame obstacle courses, learned to distinguish military equipment, kindled fires, and competed in throwing balls into a painted tank, among other activities.⁴⁷⁸ Children's awareness was receiving its first signal: «*War is interesting and not scary.*»

In 2023, Russian schools introduced a new history textbook for high school students, in which historical facts and events were rewritten from the Kremlin's perspective. The war against Ukrainians was presented as a result of provocative actions by the United States and their «European vassals,» who sought to use Ukraine as a «strike force aimed at Russia» and as a «NATO springboard.» Russia had to take «preemptive measures.» The authors of the textbook claimed that the West's ultimate goal is not hidden: it's the dismemberment of Russia and control over its resources. The textbook was written in the style of propaganda literature, filled with quotes, slogans, and ideological clichés like «*Ukraine is a neo-nazi state,*» «*the anti-people Kyiv regime,*» «*the United States is determined to fight to the last Ukrainian,*» «*the Ukrainian armed forces use their own citizens as human shields,*» «*Russia is a land of heroes,*» and so on.

The chapter about the so-called «Special Military Operation» in Ukraine concluded with a Soviet-era slogan from World War II: «Our cause is just! The enemy will be defeated! Victory will be ours!» The textbook included a map where the occupied territories of Ukraine are presented as part of the Russian Federation. In August 2023, the Russian Ministries of Education and Defense initiated the creation of a series of videos under the general title «What Are We Fighting For?» In these videos, participants of the special military operation answered children's questions and talked about the goals of the operation, soldiers' heroic deeds, and their personal motivations for taking part in combat. These videos, created to foster patriotism in students, were planned to be used in schools as part of the curriculum on «History.» This initiative received support from 79% of Russian citizens⁴⁷⁹.

Starting from September 2023, army preparation was officially incorporated into the compulsory school curriculum. The subject «Fundamentals of Life Safety» was replaced with «Fundamentals of Safety and Homeland Defense,» which included a course on basic military training. High school students were taught how to handle firearms, and grenades, and provide basic medical assistance. The introduction of these new school subjects was justified by Senator Bondarev, the head of the Russian Parliament's Defense and Security Committee: «A child is afraid of a gun. A child doesn't know what a grenade is and how to throw it! Is this normal?!» Schools were required to acquire models of guns, grenade replicas, shooting simulators, dosimeters, imitation wounds, and injuries. Children are taught military matters and «true, unpretentious patriotism.» War «veterans» returning from Ukraine who are unfit for further service are involved in this work. The Federal Agency for Youth Affairs of the Russian Federation stated that this initiative serves as a form of «rehabilitation» for war «veterans» who have returned. As part of the «Your Hero» project, the first 130 «participants in the special military operation» were prepared for mentorship of the youth in March 2023⁴⁸⁰.

In schools, military training for 10th graders has become mandatory. Adolescents are required to spend five full days in military training camps. During these sessions, students have their *«moral, psychological, and physical qualities necessary for service in the Armed Forces»* developed. They learn how to dig trenches, march in formation, shoot firearms, throw grenades, move across a battlefield, control bleeding, and follow soldier's commands, including in the event of a nuclear explosion⁴⁸¹.

In educational institutions, «Lessons of Courage» were conducted, where military personnel who have returned from the war in Ukraine told students about «Ukrainian nationalists» and the «deceptive West.»⁴⁸².

Students at the Nizhny Novgorod College were shown a photo of a dead pig covered with a Ukrainian flag during a «conceptual photography» lesson⁴⁸³.

In one of the schools in the Tyumen region, participants in combat operations appeared before third-graders wearing uniforms with chevrons depicting Joseph Stalin and featuring aggressive and obscene expressions about Ukrainians⁴⁸⁴.

In a Moscow school, senior students were given a lesson by a member of the «Wagner» private military company, who came to school with a pistol, concealed his face, promoted military service, and at the end of the lesson, asked students to fill out an application and submit it to their teacher⁴⁸⁵.

The ideological indoctrination of young people and the preparation of future «Z-soldiers» was taking place all over Russia. At the initiative of the administration of the President of the Russian Federation, «Warrior» centers in 12 regions were opened that offer military and athletic training and patriotic education for more than 9,000 youths aged 14 to 17. The organizers have mentioned that in addition to basic disciplines like marksmanship and tactical medicine, teenagers were trained in the most demanded specialties for the war in Ukraine,

such as sniping, drone operation, and electronic warfare⁴⁸⁶. The Russian government allocated 2.7 billion rubles for these purposes⁴⁸⁷.

During the summer of 2023, 68 children's military-patriotic camps operated across Russia. In many of them, children not only learned the «spirit of brotherhood in battle» but also how to use firearms⁴⁸⁸. In addition, children learned the «science of war» at summer children's health camps, where they conducted special military-patriotic sessions called «Time of Heroes.» In the first such session alone, 2,500 teenagers participated⁴⁸⁹.

Russian authorities spared no effort to support the war and military training of the youth. For example, the Bryansk Paratrooper Club received 4.7 million rubles in presidential grants for conducting a military-tactical game in terrain conditions «You and I are destined to serve Russia,» involving at least 150 individuals of conscription age and younger⁴⁹⁰.

The same foundation supported the promotion of Z-values among children with Down syndrome. They allocated 1.9 million rubles for a mini-play called «At Home with Victory.» The project's description stated, «*This will help children feel a connection to the struggle for their independence, which our country is currently waging.*»⁴⁹¹

In the city of St. Petersburg, students of a special correctional school for children with cerebral palsy produced approximately 200 trench candles for the front within a few months. «*This is how our unity is manifested,*» stated the local branch of the «United Russia» party, which organized this work⁴⁹².

Through children, their parents were encouraged to support the Russian army. As of June 2023, educational institutions have organized over 14,000 actions to collect humanitarian aid, as well as over 3,000 events to make camouflage nets and trench candles. Adults made trench stoves for heating and sewed socks, gloves, and balaclavas for soldiers⁴⁹³. Children participated in an adult endeavor, taking pride in their practical

assistance to «our soldiers at war» without reflecting on the fact that this war is taking place in a foreign country.

In April 2023, the State Duma of the Russian Federation allowed the signing of military contracts with individuals immediately upon reaching 18 years of age⁴⁹⁴. Advertisements for military service were run in educational institutions, and schools published calls for enlisting in the army after final exams. By summer, there were over a thousand posts with texts like «*Join the Armed Forces!*» and «*Protecting the Motherland is an honorable duty.*»⁴⁹⁵

In childhood and adolescence, individuals are not fully capable of critically analyzing and evaluating the statements made by adults. Vladimir Putin has ruled Russia in an authoritarian regime for over 20 years, and an entire generation of Russians has been raised on the ideals he has proposed. In August 2023, the Russian Center for the Development of Humanitarian Technologies «New Era» published the results of a study titled «The Image of Russia in the Minds of Youth.» The most accurate tag that the youth believed characterized modern Russia was the word «power.» Other leading tags included «war,» «fear,» «strength,» and «traditions.» The three main symbols of contemporary Russia, according to study participants, were the Kalashnikov rifle, the matryoshka doll, and an intercontinental ballistic missile⁴⁹⁶.

5.15. OVERBURDENED WITH EVIL

Contrary to predictions, the «partial mobilization» announced in Russia in the autumn of 2022 did not lead to public protests but only contributed to the additional «selection of patriots.» A number of war opponents or those uncertain about its validity left the country. The authorities did not impede their departure, as this served the government's interests. Those who stayed either rallied even more around the idea of «victory at any

cost» or were forced to conceal their anti-war preferences and blend in with the general sentiments. Russian special services diligently «weeded out» the information space, eradicating the last traces of disagreement with the war. According to human rights activists, as of July 21, 2023, 285 individuals were being prosecuted under criminal law for «public dissemination of knowingly false information» about the Russian army and «public actions aimed at discrediting the use of the Russian Armed Forces.» Additionally, 7,420 administrative cases have been initiated for «discrediting.»⁴⁹⁷

Through propaganda, the Kremlin was working on another reset of public sentiment. By using highly aggressive and hysterical rhetoric, politicians and propagandists presented hatred towards Ukrainians as a national idea and a war on foreign soil as a guarantee of the Russian people's survival. «*All leading NATO countries want to defeat us strategically so that our people suffer,*» said Putin, claiming that the West's goal is the disintegration of Russia and the establishment of control over its parts. The use of violence against Ukrainians was no longer denied; it was justified as a means of self-defense and the greatness of the set goals. Russian citizens were told that the suffering of the Ukrainian people was a well-deserved punishment for «betrayal of the Russian world» and a method of re-education.

«War turns cruelty into a routine, into daily motion. There is no war without cruelty, and there are no limits or boundaries to cruelty. Do I condemn our guys? No. And I never will. Support every one of our soldiers, so they don't feel guilty today,» said TV host Krasovsky,⁴⁹⁸ who, in October 2022, on a state television channel, called for the drowning and burning of Ukrainian children due to their lack of love for Russia⁴⁹⁹.

«The formation called the state of Ukraine must be wiped off the world map. People who identify as its patriots are degenerates. Many of them speak the Russian language, but that changes nothing. They are beasts; they have no human

appearance. No one feels sorry for them, absolutely no one,» rallied journalist and radio host Kluchenkov (Sergey Mardan),⁵⁰⁰ emphasizing the need to «ban the Ukrainian language in the liberated territories,» «eliminate Ukrainian identity,» and «exterminate its priests without pity, like rabid dogs.»⁵⁰¹

«We couldn't have imagined how close the enemy is already at our gates. All of Russia must go to war and fight with the entire satanic Western machine, clenching our teeth. We thought it was a pimple, but it's a cancerous tumor. Cosmetic special operations won't cut it. Otherwise, we won't exist—neither Russian culture nor Russian people,» frightened propagandist Solovyov,⁵⁰² demanding the use of tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine⁵⁰³. Solovyov currently leads the rating of the most authoritative Russian journalists, whose statements are followed most closely by Russian citizens⁵⁰⁴.

Propaganda no longer relied on purely conspiratorial theories and did not even attempt to veil blatant falsehood. Russia's permanent representative to the UN, Nebenzia, stated at a meeting of the UN Security Council that Russian drones found in the Kherson region are supposedly designed to «*disperse mosquitoes infected with dangerous viruses.*» He claimed that in Ukraine, projects of the United States on the study of infection transmission through migrating birds and bats were being implemented⁵⁰⁵. In the federal Kremlin channel «Russia 1,» they reported «*shelling by Ukrainian militants in the Donbas,*» illustrating this claim with a video of a nine-story residential building in ruins. In reality, this multi-story building was destroyed by a Russian missile strike in the city of Uman, Cherkasy region, resulting in the deaths of 24 people⁵⁰⁶.

The Russian government no longer sought the mere silence or passive support of the population; it demanded active actions and public displays of loyalty. Officials from state institutions and members of the «United Russia» party were compelled to install the «United Russi Agitator» mobile app on their devices, which sent tasks for liking and posting favorable comments on

«patriotic» content on social media⁵⁰⁷. In Russia, the volunteer movement to support servicemen was growing. In December 2022, at the «We Are Together» forum, Putin announced that the number of volunteers in Russia had exceeded 21 million people, which is approximately 15% of the country's population⁵⁰⁸. State employees were encouraged to donate a portion of their salaries to charitable funds that support servicemen⁵⁰⁹.

Like before, the Kremlin did not disclose specific information about the number of Russian servicemen killed in Ukraine. However, the existence of numerous casualties was no longer concealed. In Russia, a campaign of glorification for the fallen started. They arranged solemn funerals for them, unveiled memorial plaques in their honor, issued postage stamps⁵¹⁰, named streets and schools after them⁵¹¹, and created special websites with pompous descriptions of the «heroic feats» of deceased soldiers⁵¹². Russia has launched a nationwide campaign to install «hero desks» in school classrooms, and by June 2023, over 3,500 such desks have been set up throughout the country^{513 514}. At the All-Russian forum «School of the Hero,» the head of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation, Kravtsov, explained that young people should emulate those who gave their lives to fight «fascism in Ukraine.»⁵¹⁵

The Kremlin needs human fuel to continue the war, and propaganda teaches people to treat human life as something secondary. «*Life is excessively overrated. Why be afraid of the inevitable? Moreover, we will end up in heaven,*» encouraged Russian citizens propagandist Solovyov⁵¹⁶. The absurdity of deaths in a foreign war was compensated by the Russian government with payments of «funeral expenses» to the families and the awarding of the «hero» status regardless of the circumstances of death. «*On December 9, 2022, a solemn event was held in the village of Shyleksha dedicated to the unveiling of a memorial plaque for Sergey Obukhov, who died in Ukraine. The name of the serviceman was immortalized on the facade of his native school building. He was also posthumously awarded*

the Order of 'Valor,'» the official VKontakte page of the administration of the Kineshem district of the Russian Federation reported⁵¹⁷. However, journalists have determined that Sergeant Obukhov was killed not by Ukrainians but by FSB personnel in a drunken shootout in the occupied city of Kherson. A representative of the other side, FSB Colonel Sergey Privalov, who was shot in the same domestic conflict, was also buried with honors as if he had died in the line of military duty, as reported by a local website in a post titled «Heroes of Our Time.»⁵¹⁸

The Russo-Ukrainian war is the first global war in the history of humanity with a detailed visualization of its horrors. Anyone interested can access content with real scenes of combat, brutal killings, and other forms of violence that inevitably accompany any war. Observing the suffering and death of their soldiers elicits a dual emotional effect on Russians: on the one hand, fear for themselves and their loved ones, who may be sent to the front, and on the other hand, a hatred for the enemy country and a desire for revenge for their slain countrymen. *«Neither we nor our men wanted this war. But the entire West has united to destroy us and our children. I asked my husband to avenge the tears of mothers, the inconsolable widows, and the orphans. We will not forgive,»* promised the wife of an officer at a solemn memorial meeting for the Russian mobilized soldiers who died in Ukraine⁵¹⁹. She paid no attention to the obvious fact that they perished in a foreign country where they brought death and devastation. Mothers and wives of still-living servicemen, in their video addresses, demanded not an end to the war and the withdrawal of their husbands from Ukraine but a more thorough preparation for them to commit killings.⁵²⁰

Propaganda explained that combat losses on the front are largely due to the humanity⁵²¹ and compassion of Russian soldiers who sacrificed their interests for the sake of the civilian population. This only fuels the anger towards the «ungrateful» Ukrainians.

From intercepted phone conversations of Russian soldiers' relatives:

«Why is Putin fooling around with them - 'children, children.' These 'children,' when they grow up, will be just like the nazis. We should have taken them all and killed them. I would have injected drugs into them and watched them die, suffer. I would have cut off their genitals and carved stars on their backs. In the ear, in the finger every day - so that it hurts them. I hate these Ukrainians now. I hate them in general. I would shoot their children, too.»⁵²²



«Son, don't lose your fighting spirit. You know you're doing something important there. Remember it yourself and tell everyone. - Mom, but we're killing civilians and children... - No. You're not killing civilians and children. You're killing fascists.»⁵²³.

«You can rape Ukrainian women there. I allow it. Just don't tell me anything, and use contraceptives.»⁵²⁴.

Another reason for the hatred of the enemy during the war is the fear of defeat. 56% of surveyed Russians were convinced that if the Russian army is defeated, Ukrainian soldiers will not stop at the borders of February 2022 and will enter Russian territory⁵²⁵. Russian society is fully aware of the destructive consequences of the war that was initiated with its consent, and people are aware of the cruelty of Russian soldiers towards the civilian population. They are confident that the soldiers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine will act similarly. Propaganda inflated these fears, telling about the terrible future that awaits Russians after defeat.

«We will all hang from lampposts. Our wives and children will be cut into pieces. Our pets will be killed, and our houses will be burned down,» said propagandist Solovyov on his show «Solovyov Live.»⁵²⁶

«If we manage to lose, a specific or hypothetical Hague Tribunal awaits even the janitor who sweeps under the Kremlin wall. The scale of the catastrophe for our country, if we manage to do this, is unimaginable,» said propagandist Simonyan on the program «Evening with Vladimir Solovyov» on channel «Russia 1.»⁵²⁷.

«The most important thing for us is to support the front. We must do everything for victory. Either we win, or they will

first herd us into ghettos and then into gas chambers,» said propagandist Vityazeva on «Solovyov Live.»⁵²⁸.

In January 2023, only 1% of Russian citizens admitted the possibility of defeat, while 71% are convinced that Russia will win the war⁵²⁹. Victory became not only a priority for the military but also the meaning of life for the entire society. Russians are willing to pay the price of this victory with the lives of peaceful Ukrainians. In their New Year's greeting to Russian servicemen, women from Sakhalin accompany it with the slogan *«Victory will be ours! Kill the khokhols (derogatory Russian term for Ukrainians) - save Russia!»*⁵³⁰.

Not extremist patriots or neo-nazis, but ordinary Russians demanded on video for the destruction of an entire Ukrainian nation.

*«Eliminate all Ukrainians, even babies. Destroy the entire population. They are not brothers to us.»*⁵³¹

*«We must kill these khokhols (derogatory Russian term for Ukrainians), butcher and kill them! I hate these scumbags! They are fascists! We must destroy them! Everyone who is against Russia! They are bastards; we must burn them all to ashes!»*⁵³²

*«They are not humans. Butcher them all up.»*⁵³³

*«Until we kill them all, we are not done. Ukraine is an enemy. Poland is an enemy. The Baltic countries are enemies. These are our main enemies.»*⁵³⁴

5.16. SHOULD WE TRUST SURVEYS OF RUSSIANS?

War is a powerful unifying factor. People instinctively try to consolidate around authority, its ideas, and principles because

they expect protection and confidence in the future from the government. In the case of Russia's stance on the war, it united the Russian government and its people through the Leninist principle of «*Our morality is derived from the interests of our struggle.*» Despite the extent of the harm caused by the war, Russian society remains consistently supportive of it. If, at the beginning of the full-scale invasion in February 2022, 68% of Russians supported the occupation of Ukraine, this support increased to 72% a year later, in March 2023⁵³⁵.

In the expert community, there is a popular opinion that under Putin's authoritarian regime, survey results in Russia should be viewed skeptically because respondents do not speak the truth due to the threat of persecution. However, there are also indirect indicators pointing to the approval of aggression against Ukraine by the majority of Russians.

Vkontakte social media platform audience in Russia is 100 million, and there are only 150,000 posts with the hashtag #NoWar⁵³⁶.

As of August 2023, the Internet platform «*Za Nami Pravda*» (*the truth is with us*), created to spread content in support of Russian servicemen, has received over 7.3 million pieces of content (photos, clips, drawings, poems, etc.)⁵³⁷.

Reports to law enforcement became extremely popular in Russia: in 2022, Roskomnadzor recorded 283,789 complaints, including 133,601 complaints about anti-war posts on social media and in the media⁵³⁸. On the other hand, the Russian Prosecutor General's Office has considered over 10,000 complaints «concerning federal security and interethnic relations,» which include reports of «discrediting» the army, «financing the Armed Forces of Ukraine,» and «state treason.» A year earlier, there were fewer than 2,500 such complaints. Russians were actively and voluntarily helping the government identify their compatriots who do not support the war⁵³⁹.

A significant portion of the Russian diaspora in European countries, where there is generally no fear of punishment for their anti-war positions, justifies the entry of Russian troops into Ukraine, including support during large public actions⁵⁴⁰.

The occupation of Ukraine did not lead to a social explosion in Russia and did not trigger massive anti-war protests like those in Iran, although the Iranian government suppressed protests in an even more brutal manner. In 2022, only about 43% of protests in Russia had an anti-war focus out of their already insignificant total number⁵⁴¹.

Russian teachers, educators, healthcare professionals, and civil servants willingly moved to occupied territories for the purpose of Russification of the local population. They took up residence in homes vacated by displaced Ukrainians without a guilty conscience, justifying their criminal behavior with arguments like *«these lands have always been ours,» «we've always wanted to have a house by the sea,»* and *«the nature here is beautiful.»*⁵⁴² *«Over 40,000 Russians have already arrived in the occupied city of Mariupol. These are civilian occupiers, and their numbers are increasing. In our estimation, if the city is not de-occupied, the number of Russian citizens living and registered in Mariupol will reach 80,000 to 120,000 within a year,»* reported the advisor to the legitimate mayor of Mariupol⁵⁴³.

In Russia and European countries, there were isolated incidents of domestic ultranationalism, where the Ukrainian language,⁵⁴⁴ song,⁵⁴⁵ or national flag colors provoked hatred and aggression in Russians. *«In the Kirov region, teenagers beat a 9-year-old boy, calling him a 'Ukrainian,' just because he was riding on yellow-blue inflatable sleds.»*⁵⁴⁶ *«The school director reported a student who had a 'Ukrainian flag' ribbon in her hair,»* *The girl had a «yin-yang» symbol shaved on her head, which the school principal interpreted as a reference to the Ukrainian Azov Regiment. In the Leningrad region, a homeowner complained about his neighbor's supposedly*

yellow-blue roof, although it was also painted in two other colors – green and gray. The residents of a building in the city of Belgorod filed a report about yellow-blue curbs in the courtyard.»⁵⁴⁷.

Obviously, the war has led to a decline in the quality of life in Russia and has also become a reason for the hatred towards Ukraine from a significant number of Russians who have left their usual zone of material and psychological comfort. Even those who do not understand the objectives of the «special military operation» advocated for its continuation, explaining their position with propagandistic slogans such as «*we don't abandon our own,*» «*we must always stand with our country,*» «*if we started, we can't back down.*»⁵⁴⁸.

Many Russians justified their hatred based on hostile attitudes from Ukrainians. However, the manifestations of aggression towards anything Russian in Ukrainian society have a different origin and opposite direction. The hatred among Russians has given rise to the war, while the war and its brutality have awakened the hatred among Ukrainians. Ukrainians understand that if Russian soldiers leave the trenches, the war will end, but if Ukrainian soldiers abandon their positions, Ukraine will cease to exist.

Year after year, propaganda cultivated in Russian society convictions of its own greatness, uniqueness, power, and the special mission of its «*chosen nation.*» The Kremlin's concept of «*Russia as a civilization-state*» instilled pride in Russians and, at the same time, dissatisfaction with Russia's place in the modern world. The deliberate exacerbation of historical traumas, complexes, and grievances against the West accumulated in the society's consciousness, fostering hatred toward a «*millennium-old adversary who always hinders Russia.*»

Alongside this, the questionable ideology of the «Russian world,» which implies its continuous expansion, requires gaining new supporters and territories. Russia's return to the status of an empire is impossible without war, as empires always wage wars and conquer. After a decade of psychological indoctrination, most Russians have agreed to and internally accepted this idea. In such circumstances, propaganda no longer needs to deceive or convince society of the necessity of war; it is enough to activate its dormant aggression and direct it toward the designated enemy – Ukraine.

For a serviceman, it is essential to feel emotional support for their actions from fellow countrymen. And when society supports war and calls for violence, violence becomes inevitable. Behind every killer, rapist, and torturer in Russian military uniform, there are millions of civilians who supported the bloody war in a foreign country, making them complicit in war crimes. Without a doubt, those millions of Russian citizens who close their eyes to the obvious and claim, «*We don't know the full truth,*» are also guilty. The modern world is transparent enough and provides the opportunity to access and analyze alternatives to propaganda information. And, of course, the guilt should be shared by millions of those who are indifferent, who understand the truth but simply remain silent. Silence in the face of war is a morally unburdened form of support.

6. **AFTERWORD**

The history of modern Russia shows that the excessive and indiscriminate use of violence against civilians is not an unintended byproduct but the most acceptable way of conducting war for the Russian state. Russian political and military leadership does not know how to achieve victory without resorting

to cruelty and sees no alternative to it. The entire approach, from the recruitment of the military to the aggressive ideological and educational work with personnel, the low level of discipline, and the specifics of informal relationships among servicemen, encourages violence. Moreover, the Russian army is the army of a nation for whom a brutal war has become a fetish and where the deadliness of war only adds to its significance. The idea of «*victory at any cost,*» even in an unjust war, is a way of self-affirmation. The fact that this nation consists of descendants of victims of nazi atrocities only emphasizes the moral decline in Russian society.

Those who naively expect that the successful implementation of the plan to repel and annex parts of Ukrainian territories will calm Moscow should be warned. These are not just mistaken but dangerous illusions. Russia's victory will not only symbolize the triumph of an unjust war and the affirmation of violence as a means of conducting it, but it will also stimulate the Kremlin's top to take further steps. A defeated Ukraine will be a harbinger of even greater calamity. In December 2021, the Kremlin officially informed the U.S. and NATO⁵⁴⁹ about its primary intentions – expanding Russia's sphere of influence to the entire Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia. Ukraine's experience indicates that this involves the partial or complete loss of sovereignty by the countries in these regions. Moscow has no peaceful plans for the future, and it openly warns of it. In July 2023, the President of Russia publicly stated, «*The western territories of Poland are a gift from Stalin to the Poles. Our 'friends' in Warsaw have forgotten about this? We will remind them.*»⁵⁵⁰

Putin's statement that «*Russia's borders do not end anywhere*»⁵⁵¹ is not just a populist claim for the Russian audience. It is a public challenge to the world community and an unequivocal message that Russia has no limits after reaching which it will cease to wage war. Observing the war in Ukraine, the world should not just be horrified but also realize this threat

and address the issue of ensuring global security. Otherwise, there will come a time when NATO countries' defense plans will be discussed not at a summit in peaceful Vilnius but under Russian Iskander missile fire in a bunker near Warsaw.

«They [Russian soldiers] act absolutely recklessly and extremely brutally. They continue to wage war in a way that often makes you wonder – are these people at all? I don't wish this upon you. They will do what happened in Bucha in your cities. In the cities of any country that the Russian Federation's leadership decides to pretend is part of its empire and not the land of another nation. And even if Russian soldiers don't understand why they need to do this, they will still fight. Because it's hatred and contempt for other people that are inculcated in today's Russia, even at the state level,» warned the world President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky, in his speech to the Parliament of Finland⁵⁵².



Part II.
**War Crimes of the Russian Army
in the Occupied Territories**



In a wide range of war crimes committed by the Russian army, particular attention should be given to cases of extrajudicial executions and abuses of civilians, including the use of torture, physical and sexual violence, and unlawful detention in inhumane conditions. The exceptional cynicism in committing such atrocities lay not only in their inhuman cruelty but also in the fact that on an official level, the Russian authorities emphasized the *«liberating mission»* of their so-called *«special military operation»* and positioned the Ukrainian people as *«fraternal.»* It was primarily due to the cruelty of Russian soldiers that Ukrainians have finally dispelled such illusions.

The treatment demonstrated by Russian servicemen towards civilians radically contradicts contemporary military culture with its imperative of not committing war crimes against civilians. This provides grounds to assert that the leadership of the Russian army deliberately abandoned humane methods of warfare as stipulated by international law.

According to the provisions of the IV Hague Convention of 1907, the IV Geneva Convention of 1949, and Additional Protocol I, an occupying state is obligated to take all measures to ensure order in the occupied territory. The population cannot be compelled to swear allegiance to the occupying state, participate in military actions against their own country, or provide information about their own army. Occupying forces must treat civilians with respect for their lives, dignity, their families, property, and religious beliefs.

The prohibition of torture and other forms of cruel treatment is an absolute and universal norm of law that applies in both peacetime and wartime, with no exceptions. Article 2 of the *«Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment»* emphasizes that *«No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture.»*

In addition to the provisions applicable in peacetime, additional protection against torture during armed conflict is guaranteed to civilians by the «*Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War,*» which applies to all cases of declared war or any other armed conflict, even if one party does not recognize the state of war. Thus, Article 3 of the Convention prohibits «*Violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment, and torture*»; «*Taking of hostages*»; «*Outrages upon personal dignity, in particular, humiliating and degrading treatment*»; and «*The passing of sentences and the carrying out of executions without previous judgment pronounced by a regularly constituted court.*»

Moreover, Article 32 of the Convention emphasizes the need for humane treatment of the inhabitants of occupied territories and prohibits «*any measure of such a character as to cause the physical suffering or extermination*» of persons who are under the control of one of the parties. «*This prohibition applies not only to murder, torture, corporal punishment, mutilation and medical or scientific experiments not necessitated by the medical treatment of a protected person but also to any other measures of brutality whether applied by civilian or military agents.*»

However, the actions of the Russian army have once again clearly demonstrated that the mere existence of humanitarian law norms does not ensure the protection of the civilian population. Despite Russia being a signatory to the Geneva Conventions, its servicemen, from the first days of the war, have resorted to regular, open, and demonstrative brutality.

1. **EXTRAJUDICIAL EXECUTIONS**

The full-scale invasion and subsequent occupation of Ukrainian territories did not meet the expectations of the Russians. Assurances by Russian propaganda about the friendly attitudes of the Ukrainian population towards Russia turned out to be a myth. The residents of the occupied areas openly displayed negative attitudes toward the occupiers and, with the exception of a relatively small number of collaborators, offered passive resistance to establishing the «*new order*.» Ukrainians boycotted the creation of local pro-Russian authorities, ignored calls to resume business activities, refused to accept Russian documents, and attempted to leave en masse for territories under Ukrainian control.

Simultaneously, the Ukrainian Armed Forces regularly inflicted significant blows on the enemy's locations, resulting in substantial losses in personnel and equipment and keeping the occupiers in constant fear. Knowing about the existence of territorial defense forces in Ukraine, the occupiers panicked at the prospect of the organization and spread of a partisan movement in their rear areas, which created additional threats to their safety and the supply systems. In every peaceful Ukrainian, regardless of their gender and age, Russian soldiers saw a potential fire spotter, saboteur, informant for the Armed Forces of Ukraine, or an underground operative. Fear, hatred, and the desire for revenge for their fallen comrades transformed into cruelty, turning the so-called «*liberation mission*» into a punitive operation.

To bring Ukrainians to submission, the Russian army resorted to repressive actions, which had been tested during the Chechen wars – the «*mop-up operations*» in populated areas. In the Russian execution, these operations were traditionally accompanied by the commission of war crimes and the mass

and indiscriminate use of violence, where the target for persecution was not specific individuals but the entire civilian population. The purpose of such actions was not so much to identify representatives of the armed resistance as it was to intimidate local residents with demonstrative cruelty and ruthlessness. On the occupied territories of Ukraine, Russian soldiers employed this inhumane practice.



From intercepted phone conversations of Russian servicemen with their relatives and acquaintances:

«Do you want me to tell you a secret? We had to kill. We had to kill minors, women, everyone. Can you imagine? Full and immediate extermination. Just shoot them all to hell. I'm ready, but if I'm honest, I'm getting dizzy. They explained everything to us: fourteen-year-olds, eighteen-year-olds, girls – it's all the same. Just shoot them dead. We're going on a 'clean-up mission.' The war here is different, Sveta. You can't even imagine.» The wife responds calmly: «Well, what can you do? You know – anyone who was peaceful, they all left.»⁵⁵³

«You know how we clean-up the basements? We don't ask who's there; we just throw grenades right away. We don't care

about that. They call our unit 'the beheaders.' But we don't care. I do some terrible things here. I kill everyone. Civilian or non-civilian – I don't care. And I can also take a knife and cut off ears.» The wife responds calmly: «Yes, I know.»⁵⁵⁴

In the deadly chaos created by Russian soldiers, any actions that did not please the occupiers could be a reason for execution. However, the main war crimes can be distinguished among all committed.

1.1. EXECUTIONS BASED ON SUSPICION OF ASSISTING THE ARMED FORCES OF UKRAINE OR INVOLVEMENT IN TERRITORIAL DEFENSE

In most of the captured towns, the occupiers conducted street raids and intruded into residential properties with the aim of detaining men and verifying their involvement in territorial defense forces, past service in the Ukrainian Armed Forces or law enforcement agencies, as well as participation in the anti-terrorist operation in Eastern Ukraine. Every man, even those not subject to military conscription, risked execution, as Russian soldiers did not concern themselves with the need to confirm their suspicions with even minimal evidence.⁵⁵⁵

In February 2022, the Russians conducted a «clean-up operation» in the village of Stary Bykiv in the Chernihiv region. They went through the households of local residents and took six men from three different families with them. The relatives of those detained were told not to worry, as the soldiers would only «punish them a little» and then release them. The next day, the mother of one of the detainees found their bodies on the outskirts of the village. «They were all lying there. Shot in the head. Their hands were tied behind their backs. I checked my son. His clothing pockets were empty – no phone, no keys, no documents,» she explained.⁵⁵⁶

Extrajudicial punishment by death was often applied based on denunciations, the discovery of photos of individuals in military uniforms, hunting weapons, or camouflage clothing during searches, even though such items were commonly used by civilians (hunters, fishermen, foresters, etc.). The occupiers were particularly ruthless towards people whose mobile phones contained photos of military equipment, local areas, or the destruction caused by the war – such automatically equated them to resistance participants. *«Those were terrifying days. When nothing belongs to you, not your yard, not your house, not even your life. Leaving was forbidden; if you ventured out, they'd shoot you. Enemy vehicles entered our yard. On March 5th, they broke the windows, stormed in, and took our phones. They monitor everything – your social media posts, Telegram channels, and if you write something they don't like, it's a death sentence,»* recalls a resident of Bucha.⁵⁵⁷

«Soldiers started patrolling the streets, entering houses, checking phones. They found some photographs in one guy's phone that they didn't like, and they shot him. The next day, they entered the last house on the street, near which barricades had been built earlier. The Russians ordered the owner to come out and asked, 'You have barricades here; did you help build them?' And without waiting for an answer, they shot him,» recounted an elderly man who survived the occupation.⁵⁵⁸

*On March 19, 2022, in a village in the Kyiv region, Russian servicemen took away a 45-year-old man from a house where, during a search, they found an old military jacket. The detainee's mother knew nothing about her son's fate until March 31, after the Russian troops had retreated. She found his body in a shed about 100 meters from the house. The shed's door was open, and his legs protruded outside. The mother immediately recognized her son's sneakers. He had been shot in the ear, and a jacket was thrown on his body.*⁵⁵⁹

A 43-year-old railway inspector, a father of two, was taken from a hamlet on the outskirts of the city of Bucha and executed simply because his phone contained photos of several fires. «They took Oleksandr behind the fence. In a few minutes, we heard a single shot and then three more. We understood they had killed him. We asked if we could bury him, and one of the soldiers replied, ‘No,» recalled a friend of the victim who was executed.⁵⁶⁰

1.2. EXECUTIONS FOR VIOLATING THE OCCUPIERS' ESTABLISHED REGIME

After capturing each town, the Russians imposed extremely strict restrictions on the local population concerning the use of mobile communication, the internet, and devices with cameras. Residents were prohibited from approaching the military positions they established and free movement on roads and streets, even if it was necessary for basic needs. Displays of disagreement with the actions of the occupiers or violations of their established rules were often punished by death.

Not far from the village of Rakivka in the Kyiv region, the body of a local resident, an elderly retired law enforcement officer, was found, shot dead. During the occupation, the man went out to gather firewood and was detained by Russian soldiers. The occupiers stripped him, shot him, and buried him in a field near their military positions. «Signs of torture were found on the victim’s body. Firearm wounds to the chest area were also recorded,» informed the chief of the Kyiv Region Police about the results of the body examination.⁵⁶¹

In September 2022, during the occupation of the village of Pravdyne in the Kherson region, Russian servicemen drove heavy equipment into the yard of a 56-year-old local resident.

She expressed her dissatisfaction with their actions, and they shot her near her own home with automatic weapons.⁵⁶²

In March 2022, in the town of Mykhailo-Kotsiubynske in the Chernihiv region, Russian soldiers detained a 38-year-old man. He was suspected of filming the movements of Russian forces on his phone. Initially, they forced the man to dig trenches for Russian soldiers (such actions violate the laws of war), and then they shot and buried him in a forest near the village.⁵⁶³

During a phone conversation with his girlfriend, a Russian soldier casually recounted the killing of three civilians. «We detained them, stripped them naked, checked all their clothing. Then we made a decision about what to do with them. If we just let them go, they could report our positions. So, we decided just to shoot them in the forest. And we did. Because if we just take them prisoner, then we'd have to feed them, and we don't have much food,» explained the soldier's reasoning for executing these individuals.⁵⁶⁴

1.3. EXECUTIONS FOR PRO-UKRAINIAN POSITION OR REFUSAL TO COOPERATE WITH THE OCCUPYING REGIME

Putin declared «Ukraine's denazification» as a main goal of the war. In its essence and intentions, it's an attempt to eliminate the national and state consciousness of Ukrainian society and forcefully assimilate Ukraine into the framework of the «Russian world.» By equating everything Ukrainian with the nazi ideology, the occupiers often took the lives of people whom they, at their own discretion, identified as «nationalists» and supporters of the «Kyiv junta.»

On July 31, 2022, Russian military personnel arrived at a farm in the village of Bezmiatezhne in the Kharkiv region, which was owned by a man originally from the Zakarpattia region with an active pro-Ukrainian position. His fellow

villagers called him «Vuyko» (an uncle in one of the Western Ukrainian dialects). One of the soldiers ordered the farmer to approach and help with a vehicle repair. When the man followed the order and came closer, a soldier shot him in the head. «Subsequently, the servicemen dismembered the body and discarded its remains along the road to another village,» reported the Kharkiv Regional Prosecutor's Office, which is investigating this murder.⁵⁶⁵

In the Kyiv region, occupiers detained two volunteers who were attempting to deliver humanitarian aid to the village of Motyzhyn. Russian servicemen interrogated and tortured them, then took them to a forested area and ordered them to run. And when volunteers started running, the soldiers opened fire at them. One of the volunteers was killed by a gunshot to the head, and the other was severely wounded. Russian military personnel stole their vehicles and humanitarian aid in them.⁵⁶⁶

On May 7, 2022, in the occupied city of Iziurm, a Russian soldier entered the forensic pathology department of the local hospital, where three medics were working. When one of the medics said that the presence of the Russian army in Ukraine was illegal, the Russian serviceman struck the man in the face several times and then shot him.⁵⁶⁷

In the occupied territories, the occupiers attempted to legitimize the «new authorities» through the collaboration of Ukrainian officials and politicians and by engaging entrepreneurs, media representatives, and other well-known individuals. Unwillingness to cooperate with the occupying regime and, in some cases, just a refusal to do one-time assignments from Russian military personnel resulted in tragic consequences.

In the Kyiv region, occupiers detained the 50-year-old headman of the village of Motyzhyn along with her husband and son. Later, their bodies, with the signs of torture and

*bound hands, were found buried in a forest near the village. «The entire family died from multiple gunshot wounds. Five soldiers of the Russian army and three mercenaries of the PMC ‘Wagner’ are implicated in the crime. Their identities have been established,» reported the prosecutor’s office.*⁵⁶⁸

*In occupied Kherson, Russian military personnel shot the chief conductor of the Kherson Philharmonic in his own home.*⁵⁶⁹ *The Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine informed about the reasons for the execution: «By October 1, the International Day of Music, the Russians planned to hold a concert in Kherson with the participation of the renowned chamber orchestra ‘Hilea.’ According to their plan, this event was to demonstrate the so-called ‘establishment of peaceful life’ in the city. However, the conductor categorically refused to cooperate with the occupiers.»*⁵⁷⁰

In March 2022, Russians established a temporary military checkpoint on the territory of the Gostomel Animal Shelter. To unload and transport ammunition, they attempted to involve the local civilians. «When one of the men refused to assist the occupiers, the commander ordered his subordinate to execute him,» as reported by the Office of the Prosecutor General.⁵⁷¹

1.4. EXECUTIONS TO CONCEAL OTHER CRIMES

The occupation of Ukraine has become a clear indicator of the deep moral crisis that has engulfed Russian society. Russian soldiers, in their civilian lives, were accustomed to living in an impoverished, sometimes semi-criminal social environment where the legal nihilism of citizens and the lawlessness of law enforcement were considered the norm. Finding themselves at war in a foreign country, they have completely shed the need to adhere to universal human values. With a sense of absolute power over defenseless people, complete impunity for any actions, and with weapons in their

arms, Russian servicemen activated and showed the worst and most repugnant human qualities. The wartime violence on the frontlines quickly transformed into lawlessness in the rear – thefts, looting, sexual assaults, and abuse of the civilian population. Russian servicemen often killed the victims or witnesses to conceal the commission of such crimes.

«There is one unit. They captured a woman, cut out her tongue so that she couldn't speak, and raped her. Then they killed her,» a Russian soldier recounted horrific details of a Ukrainian woman's suffering in the occupied Kharkiv region in a phone conversation intercepted by the Security Service of Ukraine.⁵⁷²

In the basement of a shed near a house in the city of Bucha at the beginning of April 2022, the body of a woman was found. She was naked and wrapped in a fur coat. The body was missing a portion of the head, and there were open wounds on the front part of the thighs, abdomen, and upper chest. The woman was later identified.⁵⁷³

«They [Russian military] took everything from people here,» recalls a resident of the village of Andriivka in the Kyiv region about the occupation. «Vovka, our neighbor, had a saw for cutting firewood – small and neat. I saw one of the soldiers walking around with this saw, swinging it. Vovka himself was shot.»

«We conducted searches of three village residents. They had a bundle of money: hryvnias, dollars, and more. The lieutenant colonel who was with us took that money for himself and gave us the rest, along with the phones. Then he said, 'Execute these civilians.' I led one of them out of the house and told him, 'Walk ahead.' He walked. I told him, 'Kneel.' And then shot a bullet to the back of his head. I trembled for a very long time afterward,» confessed a Russian serviceman to journalists during an interview, admitting to the murder.⁵⁷⁴

Civilians who survived the terror of Russian occupation reported that soldiers often executed people spontaneously, without any apparent reason, driven by emotions or acting out their sadistic tendencies.

«They pushed me, my husband, and our 10-year-old daughter into the boiler room. Then they asked my husband if he had cigarettes. He replied that he didn't and that he hadn't smoked for weeks. One of the soldiers said, 'Finish him,' and they shot my husband in the head. He bled from 21:30 to 4:00. Then I turned back to my daughter and said, 'It seems that daddy has passed away,» recalled a resident of the village of Bohdanivka in the Kyiv region.⁵⁷⁵

«Two brothers lived on Ivan Franko Street, and Russian soldiers occupied their house. The soldiers forced the brothers to work for them - the brothers had to feed them and to heat the bath for them. And when they were leaving, the soldiers 'thanked' these brothers by simply shooting them,» said a man who managed to escape from the occupied town of Bucha.⁵⁷⁶

To intimidate and subdue local residents, Russian soldiers resorted to public executions or killed people with exceptional cruelty.

On March 4, 2022, occupiers gathered around 40 people in the square in the town of Bucha. Later, they brought five more men. «The soldiers made them kneel along the roadside with their shirts pulled over their heads. Then they shot one of them in the back of the head. He fell. The women screamed. The commander told the rest of the people in the square, 'Don't worry. You're all fine, and he was just filth. We're here to cleanse you of the filth.' On March 9, the man's body was

still lying where he had been shot,» recalled a local teacher who was present during the execution.⁵⁷⁷

Ukrainian law enforcement exhumed the bodies of six killed people in the village of Stary Bykiv in the Chernihiv region. One of them had multiple rib fractures and a stab wound to the heart, while another had a slashed throat.⁵⁷⁸

«We captured a Ukrainian guy here yesterday. We did a lot of interesting things to him. He's already in another world now. I stuck my knife right into his heart. He screamed, 'No! No!' but I hit him, and that was it. I wanted to try cutting his tendons,» describes a Russian soldier who murdered a Ukrainian man in a phone conversation with his wife. «To hell with him,» she replies indifferently.⁵⁷⁹

It would be a mistake to assume that the killing of civilians is solely the result of the impetuosity and cruelty of ordinary soldiers. Numerous witnesses indicated that Russian army commanders not only failed to stop such war crimes but also encouraged their subordinates to commit them and even directly issued orders to execute unarmed civilians. «They told us that at the location we were going to, many civilians walk around. They ordered us to kill anyone we saw - they could inform someone about our position. Kill them and drag them into the forest,» confessed a Russian soldier to his relative over the phone about the criminal order from the leadership.⁵⁸⁰

A resident of the village of Novyi Bykiv in the Chernihiv region reported that he and 20 other local residents were held in the village boiler room. On March 30, 2022, several Russian servicemen entered the building, stating that they had orders to execute eight individuals, and inquired if there were any «volunteers» among them. No one volunteered, so the soldiers themselves selected and took out the eight detainees. After the village was liberated, the bodies of two out of the eight men were found approximately 50 meters from the boiler room. Their heads had been crushed. The body of

another man was found later nearby; the fate of the other five remains unknown.⁵⁸¹

The Prosecutor's Office of the Kyiv region established that in February 2022, during the occupation of the village of Peremoha in the Kyiv region, Russian military personnel took eight peaceful residents with them. Initially, the occupiers interrogated the men to obtain information about law enforcement representatives and territorial defense members. Subsequently, upon the battalion commander's orders, they executed five of the detainees.⁵⁸²

The disregard for the laws and customs of war by commanders, their personal cruelty, or simply their indifference to the lives of civilians fueled the mass atrocities committed by the Russian army and left horrific traces behind. «There's a forest where the division's headquarters are located. I just went into that forest and saw a sea of bodies in civilian clothing. A sea of bodies. I've never seen so many bodies in my damned life. There's no end to these bodies. You can't see where they end,» an occupant shares his impressions during a phone call.⁵⁸³ In the liberated territories, there are places of spontaneous individual and mass burials of murdered people. The headlines of law enforcement websites became a horrifying chronicle of counting the victims of Russian aggression.

On April 7, 2022, in the basement of one of the houses in the village of Husarivka in the Kharkiv region, charred body parts of three people were discovered. According to the investigation, they were tortured and killed by Russian soldiers during the occupation. In an attempt to destroy evidence of their crimes, the perpetrators covered the bodies with car tires and set them on fire.⁵⁸⁴

In a forest near the village of Nove Zalissia in Kyiv region, next to the former Russian positions, the body of a man was found. The deceased's hands were tied with a rope, and a tow cable was around his neck.⁵⁸⁵

*In the town of Velyka Oleksandrivka in the Kherson region, Russian military personnel shot two local residents, aged 57 and 71, who were in the yard of one of the men's homes. Both victims were buried in a single grave in their hometown.*⁵⁸⁶

*During the occupation of Trostianets in the Sumy region, Russian soldiers cruelly tortured and killed a man. His body, with multiple physical injuries, was found in a garage after the city was liberated from the occupiers. The identity of the deceased is being established.*⁵⁸⁷

Jake Sullivan, the United States National Security Advisor, stated that the Kremlin had premeditated plans to kill Ukrainian civilians. According to him, the information about the executions of Ukrainians by Russian military personnel, including in Bucha, was «*horrifying but not surprising.*» Sullivan reported that, according to American intelligence, Russia had prepared for such actions even before the full-scale war began.⁵⁸⁸

In February 2022, on the eve of the invasion, the United States government sent a letter to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva, informing them of «*reliable information*» regarding the Kremlin's preparation of a list of Ukrainian citizens to be killed or sent to camps after the Russian invasion.⁵⁸⁹

«*We knew that Putin's plans for the invasion included extrajudicial executions,*» stated Richard Moore, the chief of the British Secret Intelligence Service MI6.⁵⁹⁰

«*Mass killings of Ukrainians were neither random acts nor the initiatives of individual soldiers. Materials from German intelligence indicate with a high probability that the killings of civilians could have been part of a 'clear strategy' to 'intimidate the civilian population and suppress resistance,'*» reported the German newspaper Der Spiegel.⁵⁹¹

«*It is impossible to unleash such a scale of brutality against citizens without the aim of annihilating Ukrainians*

as a nation. This is unusual for an armed conflict. The level of aforethought is staggering,» according to Wayne Jordash, one of the leaders of the international human rights organization Global Rights Compliance, who leads the «*Mobile Justice Team*,» a consultancy unit that works closely with Ukrainian prosecutors.⁵⁹²

«*These are not isolated atrocities. In regions that were under Russian occupation, we will find a significant number of similar actions. The goal of these killings is the same - to exact revenge on the population for daring to resist. They did the same in Afghanistan. They did the same in Chechnya. It's the doctrine of anti-guerrilla warfare, which involves collective punishment,*» predicts Jack Watling from the British Defense and Security Analysis Center.⁵⁹³

2. **SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

The civilized world considers sexual violence against the residents of the occupied territories as one of the most severe and abhorrent war crimes. Article 75 of Protocol Additional to the Geneva Convention (Protocol I) emphasizes that «*violence to the life, health, or physical or mental well-being of persons, in particular [...] outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment, enforced prostitution and any form of indecent assault*» shall remain prohibited at any time and in any place. Furthermore, international humanitarian law places special emphasis on ensuring the sexual integrity of women, endowing them with a particular status during wartime. Article 27 of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War underscores that «*women shall be especially protected against any attack on their honour, in particular against rape, enforced*

prostitution, or any form of indecent assault.» Article 76 of the Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions (Protocol I) states that *«women shall be the object of special respect and shall be protected in particular against rape, forced prostitution and any other form of indecent assault.»*

Many countries' military traditions uphold the norm of ethical behavior, cultivating a deep respect for women and considering any violation of their sexual freedom as disgraceful and incompatible with the concept of military dignity. *«Soldiers must be polite to the civilian population, show special attention to disabled individuals, the elderly, women, and children, and contribute to the protection of their honor and dignity. Soldiers must constantly set an example of high culture, modesty, and restraint, strictly adhere to military honor, and respect the dignity of others,»* teaches the *«Statute of Internal Service of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation.»*⁵⁹⁴ However, despite such instructions, the number of sexual crimes committed by Russian military personnel on Russian territory has increased by 4.5 times over the last ten years. In 2022, Russian courts received at least 110 criminal cases of this nature.⁵⁹⁵ Entering another country with weapons and plunging it into bloody chaos, Russian soldiers had no intention of changing their habits. Harshness and violence, including sexual violence, prevailed against women in the occupied territories.

The first reports of sexual violence began to emerge immediately after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, society began to comprehend the full extent of the suffering experienced by Ukrainians as the Russian army left captured cities and villages. According to the Prosecutor General's Office (as of August 11, 2023), 225 cases of sexual violence by occupiers have been documented since the beginning of the full-scale military aggression. A total of 146 women and 79 men, including 13 minors (12 girls and one boy), were affected. The highest number of cases of sexual violence was

recorded in Kherson region - 68, followed by Donetsk - 55, Kyiv - 52, Kharkiv - 20, Zaporizhzhia - 15, Chernihiv, and Mykolaiv - 5 each, Luhansk - 3, and Sumy - 2.⁵⁹⁶ The oldest victim was 82 years old, and the youngest was only 4.⁵⁹⁷

Of course, the provided numbers do not fully convey the true scale of the tragedy that has befallen the Ukrainian nation. A significant part of Ukraine's territory is still under the control of occupying forces. Furthermore, official statistics on sexual crimes usually do not reflect the real situation because a large number of victims, due to the stigma surrounding the topic in society, feel shame, fear condemnation, aim to avoid disclosure, or are not ready to interact with law enforcement due to psychological trauma. According to UN experts, for every rape recorded in connection with the armed conflict, there are between 10 and 20 undocumented and uninvestigated cases. «*The available data is only the tip of the iceberg. We are dealing with crimes, the number of which is chronically understated,*» assessed Pramila Patten, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.⁵⁹⁸ The significant number of crimes against sexual integrity and human freedoms in the occupied territories became a big challenge for Ukraine's law enforcement system. In August 2022, the Prosecutor General decided to establish a special department to investigate them.⁵⁹⁹

The criminal behavior of the Russian soldiers towards Ukrainian women was significantly influenced by the overall foreign policy course of the Kremlin, which actively propagated a condescending and biased attitude towards Ukrainians in Russian society, portraying Ukrainians in general, and Ukrainian women in particular, in a derogatory manner. Moreover, the propaganda carefully crafted an image of Europe as a «*hotbed of debauchery,*» and Ukraine's pro-European orientation was presented as an indicator of sexual promiscuity among Ukrainians, particularly women. Year after year, Russian propaganda materials infused with disdain in

the media planted stereotypes about the frivolity and amorality of Ukrainian women, their accessibility to men, and their readiness for commercial sex.

*«They have the mentality of prostitutes or lovers of wealthy people. They are for entertainment but not for life. The symbol of Ukraine - a bright, vulgar, sexual, bloodthirsty beauty» (article «The Ruin of Ukraine Began with Women»).*⁶⁰⁰

*«Prostitutes are a Ukrainian brand. They have even surpassed the Gypsies and are taking clients away from them. Recently, in Europe, there's a constant discussion about Ukrainian prostitutes - they say there are so many of them» (article «Buttocks with Zelensky Cost More. Ukrainian Prostitutes Have Flooded Europe»).*⁶⁰¹

*«Ukrainian girls are actively and expensively selling their chastity one after the other. What is happening with the sexual services of Ukrainian women, and why has this phenomenon, known worldwide, flourished in this country?» (article «Ukrainian Women Have Achieved an Intimate Union with Europe»).*⁶⁰²

*««Ukrainian women would spend their 'coffin money' [money saved for burial expenses] just to be raped by Russian soldiers,» - said Krasovsky, a popular propagandist in Russia, on October 20, 2022, during his show «Antonyms» on the RT channel.*⁶⁰³

Politicians and ideologists of the «Russian world» persistently promoted among Russians the idea of the possibility and even desirability of using violence as one of the means to «educate» Ukrainian people. *«Forceful coercion into intimate relationships is the only method that has historically proven its effectiveness in the Ukrainian direction. I don't think there*

will be any other way,» declared Surkov, a former aide to the President of Russia and an inspiration for the «*Novorossiya*» project.⁶⁰⁴ «*Like it or not, endure it, my beauty,»* Putin stated on February 7, 2022, referring to the necessity of «*political rape*» of Ukraine.⁶⁰⁵ Two weeks later, the world was horrified by news of mass rapes of Ukrainian women by Russian soldiers.

Russia's treatment of the civilian population in Ukraine ultimately revealed the barbaric nature of the Kremlin's unleashed aggression. Alongside the occupied territories, Russians regarded Ukrainian women as their war spoils. However, these rapes were not mere byproducts of war, acts of soldiers' lust, or a result of their disregard for military discipline. A range of factors, particularly the systematic nature of these crimes, their widespread occurrence on all occupied territories, and the specific methods used give grounds to claim that sexual violence was used by Russians as a means of intimidating the civilian population and bringing it to submission. In order to achieve this goal, Russians resorted to the most abhorrent method of undermining self-esteem and oppressing the nation - the sexual degradation of its women. The occupiers made rape the symbol of their dominance and a vivid demonstration to the civilian population of its vulnerability and the deprivation of any rights.

The commanders of the Russian army not only turned a blind eye to crimes against sexual integrity but also encouraged their subordinates to commit acts of rape and even participated in them personally. British lawyer Wayne Jordash, who consults with the Ukrainian prosecutor's office, stated that there were signs of tacit consent by commanders to sexual violence in 30 cases he examined.⁶⁰⁶

A Russian serviceman, in an interview with CNN, revealed that during the occupation of the Kyiv region, his unit's commanders were well aware of rapes and killings but showed no interest in restoring legality. He said, «They reacted like this: 'It happened. So what?' He further explained, *'I saw soldiers*

running somewhere, and later I found out they had raped a mother and daughter.” According to him, commanders merely shrugged when they learned about these rapes.⁶⁰⁷

An officer allowed soldiers to enter a house where women were staying. Witnesses heard him tell his men, “Alright, go ahead,” while he remained outside waiting for them. As they headed towards the residence, one of the servicemen audibly contemplated, “We’ll just beat this one, and we’ll rape that one.”⁶⁰⁸

In the town of Izium in the Kharkiv region, two Russian occupiers took a woman from a private house and transported her on an armored vehicle to the commander of their regiment. On the way, they placed a hood over the woman’s head and indecently touched her exposed breasts by lifting her sweater and bra. In the house where the Russians were staying, one of the soldiers coerced the victim into sexual intercourse, but another halted his actions, stating that their commander should be the first to rape the woman. The latter did indeed repeatedly rape the victim, brandishing a firearm as a threat. Subsequently, the woman was also subjected to sexual assault by his subordinates. The Ukrainian prosecutor’s office has managed to identify the individuals responsible for these war crimes.⁶⁰⁹

Propaganda-fueled hatred for Ukraine, combined with a desire for vengeance for their military losses, resulted in an extraordinary level of cruelty among Russian soldiers. They sought to unleash their anger on innocent civilians, inflicting both severe physical and moral trauma. The absence of discipline, a sense of complete impunity, and the often-consumed alcohol further unhinged the animal instincts of these servicemen, leading to sexual violence taking on gruesome and inhumane forms.

2.1. RAPE COMBINED WITH THE KILLING OF LOVED ONES

«At gunpoint, a soldier led me to a house nearby and ordered, 'Undress, or I'll shoot you.' Then he began to rape me,» recalls a 50-year-old resident of the Kyiv region. «My husband tried to run after me to save me, but he was shot - the bullets struck his abdomen.» Two days after being wounded, the husband passed away.⁶¹⁰

On March 9, 2022, several Russian invaders entered the home where a couple lived with their 4-year-old child. The occupiers shot the husband in the yard, after which two soldiers raped his wife. On that day, the soldiers returned twice more, subjecting the woman to further sexual assaults, all the while threatening that if she resisted, they would harm her young son. «You'd better keep quiet, or I'll bring your child here and show her your mother's brains scattered on the floor,» recalled the woman, recounting the words of one of the occupiers.⁶¹¹

A 42-year-old woman from the Kyiv region recounted how Russian soldiers shot her neighbor at the beginning of March 2022, and then they raped both her and the murdered neighbor's wife. According to the woman, the neighbor's 15-year-old son committed suicide a few weeks after the sexual assault of his mother.⁶¹²

2.2. RAPE COMBINED WITH ASSAULT AND TORTURE

In the Kyiv region, two armed Russian occupiers stopped a pregnant local resident on the street and, threatening her with weapons, forced her to enter a house. The woman pleaded with them not to harm her, but one of the soldiers struck the victim in the face with a rifle, knocking out her teeth, and began to rape her. The woman lost consciousness,

and the second serviceman revived her with water before also subjecting her to sexual assault. As a result of these actions, she lost her child. The police managed to identify the perpetrators.⁶¹³

In the village of Mala Rogan in the Kharkiv region, a woman, along with her 5-year-old daughter, mother, and 13-year-old sister, were hiding in the basement of a local school. A Russian army soldier entered the basement and forced the victim to accompany him to a classroom. To terrify her, the Russian fired two shots into the ceiling, stating that this was meant to provide the woman with «additional motivation.» Following this, the Russian occupant, holding a knife to the woman's throat and cutting the skin on her neck, proceeded to rape her. He also cut the woman's cheek, severed a portion of her hair, and physically assaulted her.⁶¹⁴

In the village of Bohdanivka in the Kyiv region, three soldiers forced their way into the home of a 55-year-old woman. Two of them took turns raping her while the third watched. «They strangled me. Their fingers encircled my throat completely, and I don't even remember if I lost consciousness or not. I wanted to hang myself back then. I had already prepared a noose in the garage. It was my daughter, who gave birth on April 2, who stopped me. But I'm lost now. I'm broken. I don't have the strength to pick up my grandchild,» the victim recounted.⁶¹⁵

2.3. RAPE OF CHILDREN AND ELDERLY INDIVIDUALS

On March 13, 2022, in the town of Baryshivka in the Kyiv region, two Russian military servicemen broke into the home of a couple with a young daughter. One of the soldiers sexually assaulted the child, involving nudity and inappropriate touching, oral penetration, and the simulation of sexual

intercourse. Meanwhile, the second soldier held the parents at gunpoint in the kitchen.⁶¹⁶

The Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine released an intercepted phone conversation between soldiers of the so-called «DNR» discussing the state of discipline in the occupation forces. «They're doing all sorts of things here, to the point that they even raped an eight-year-old girl,» one of the occupiers shared.⁶¹⁷

In the village of Myroliubivka in the Kherson region, a Russian soldier raped a 75-year-old teacher. «He was about 60 years old and reeked of alcohol. He immediately punched me in the face, knocking out two teeth and breaking my nose. Then he hit me with his rifle in the chest and head. I didn't understand what I did wrong. He grabbed me by the hair, threw me on the couch, and started choking me. After that, I couldn't swallow water for two weeks. Then the soldier took off my clothes and raped me. And he also cut my abdomen, I still have scars on it,» the victim recalled. After subjecting her to this abuse, a Russian soldier warned the woman that if she ever spoke about the rape, he would return and kill her.⁶¹⁸

2.4. RAPE IN THE PRESENCE OF LOVED ONES

In the Kyiv region, with the aim of inflicting additional moral suffering on a married couple, Russian soldiers, threatening them with weapons, forced the husband to watch for 30 minutes as they raped his wife. To prevent any attempts to interfere with the violence, Russian soldiers hit the husband on the head several times with a metal pot and then beat him with their feet and hands.⁶¹⁹

In one of the villages in the Kherson region, a Russian soldier kidnapped a minor from her home and, in the presence of her mother and grandmother, raped her. Ukrainian Prosecutor General Andriy Kostin shared this during an address to the

2.5. GROUP AND SYSTEMATIC RAPES

*In the Kyiv region, three Russian army soldiers repeatedly entered a private house where two women and a minor girl lived. Displaying their weapons, they took turns leading one of the women to the garage, where they raped her. Meanwhile, the other soldiers remained outside to overcome any potential resistance from the victim's relatives and neighbors. One of the soldiers raped her once during the occupation, another twice, and a third did so daily for a week.*⁶²¹

*In the Kharkiv region, three Russian army soldiers forcibly entered a house where a woman lived with her family. Threatening to shoot her family, they forced her to go with them. The occupiers blindfolded the victim so she couldn't recognize the location. Taking advantage of the woman's fear to resist, they took turns raping her. As a result of the sexual assault, the victim sustained injuries, as confirmed by a forensic medical examination.*⁶²²

*During the occupation of one of the villages in the Kherson region, a 48-year-old Russian army serviceman conducted a search at the home of a woman who lived alone with her minor son. Exploiting the situation, he began coercing her into sexual relations, threatening to kill the child if she refused. In addition, the occupant threatened the victim by stating that he would bring other soldiers who would also abuse her. After the rape, the soldier settled in her house and continued sexually abusing her for four months, from mid-April to the end of August 2022.*⁶²³

2.6. OTHER FORMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

It's essential to note that the concept of «sexual violence» is much broader than the term «rape» and includes any violent acts against a person's sexuality: genital mutilation, forced nudity, obtaining sexual services in exchange for food or protection, forced public sexual acts, threats of sexual humiliation, and more. On the occupied territories, Russian military personnel resorted to the most barbaric methods of sexual abuse and humiliation of Ukrainians.

In the torture chambers of the city of Kherson, occupiers systematically applied electric shocks to the genitals of detainees. Wires from a military field phone were connected to the person's genitalia, and an electric current was applied through them. «The pain from this is different from the pain of being beaten with a rubber baton. In the cells, we could immediately tell when someone was being tortured with electricity by their screams,» recalls with horror one of the former inmates of the torture chamber. «Torturers attached wires to people's genitals, and they made me attach wires to my genitals myself,» said another.⁶²⁴

«Among the most horrific injuries I've seen here were burns on the genitalia of one of the patients. He reported that they [Russian soldiers] attached two wires from a car battery to his groin and told him to stand on a wet piece of cloth,» said a doctor who worked in the city of Kherson.⁶²⁵ According to the Prosecutor General's Office, as of December 13, 2022, more than 30 cases of civilians being tortured with electric current passed through their genitalia have been documented on the occupied territories.⁶²⁶

In the Kyiv region, two Russian soldiers entered a house, repeatedly raped a 22-year-old woman, committed sexual assault on her husband, and then forced the couple into sexual intercourse in their presence.⁶²⁷

*In the city of Kherson, Russian occupiers demanded a 26-year-old woman, who was a volunteer, to participate in the filming of a propaganda video glorifying Russia. They threatened her with rape and then tied her half-naked to a table. For 15 minutes, an investigator used obscene language to insult the woman, after which he let seven more men into the room. «I didn't know what would happen next and was extremely frightened,» the victim recounted.*⁶²⁸

The independent international UN commission investigating violations in Ukraine, among other war crimes committed by the armed forces of Russia, has identified and documented numerous cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence in the occupied territories.⁶²⁹ *«Sexual violence has been committed against victims of various ages. Sometimes, family members, including children, were forced to witness these crimes. Sexual violence is an aspect of the torture used by the Russians,»* as stated in the report submitted by the commission to the UN General Assembly.⁶³⁰

The United States Ambassador to the UN, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, called upon members of the organization to familiarize themselves with the report from the Ukrainian prosecution on cases of sexual violence perpetrated by the Russian military against Ukrainian women during her speech in the UN Security Council. *«I urge everyone at these tables today: listen and read this report. The details are far too horrible and genuinely horrify me, I won't repeat them,»* she said.⁶³¹

«Russian soldiers rape civilians not only because they feel impunity, but also because rape is part of their military strategy. Rape is a weapon of war,» believes the British Ambassador to Ukraine, Melinda Simmons.⁶³²

«The quantity and blatantness of rapes against peaceful Ukrainians make it possible to confidently state that this is a deliberate policy of the Russian army, their conscious psychological and physical weapon against Ukrainians,» said

Olena Zelenska, the wife of the President of Ukraine, during the international conference «*United for Justice*.»⁶³³ She continued, «*The world must know the truth, even the shocking truth. It must see what the occupiers are doing to Ukrainians. Our struggle is not just for territory and square kilometers. We must liberate these lands because rapists and marauders still prevail in the occupied territories. As long as they are there, violence continues.*»⁶³⁴

The official Kremlin did not acknowledge the numerous instances of crimes against the sexual integrity and freedom of Ukrainians committed by Russian servicemen in the occupied territories. Traditionally, they accused international institutions of having a bias against Russia. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs cynically referred to the evidence collected by Ukrainian and international investigators as a «*compilation of rumors and gossip*» aimed at discrediting the Russian army.⁶³⁵ However, intercepted and publicly disclosed phone call transcripts between Russian soldiers and their relatives or acquaintances, as carried out by Ukrainian intelligence agencies, leave no room for doubt – the occupiers have crossed the boundaries of evil.

Excerpts from phone conversations of Russian military personnel:

«*Do you know why they are not letting soldiers into the city now? They raped a 12-year-old girl. Ten men. And they can't find them.*»⁶³⁶

«*I met a girl here. I don't know how to invite her for a 'meeting for two' (laughs). She is sitting tied up in our place.*»⁶³⁷

«*People are going crazy. In the neighboring village, our guys raped an adult woman and a 16-year-old girl.*»⁶³⁸

«They hate us all here. Our soldiers rape women, they are scum. I can't take it anymore; I want to leave. But they told me it's either execution or war.»⁶³⁹

«Here, our three tank crewmen raped a 16-year-old girl.»⁶⁴⁰

«They raped a 55-year-old woman and beat her husband. Then they shot and buried them. And they said the Russian army was not capable of this. But it's capable of anything.»⁶⁴¹

«Here, they raped a woman. It's unclear if they were deserters or volunteers.»⁶⁴²

«We're in trouble: the soldiers from Ryazan came; five men raped one woman, then they killed her.»⁶⁴³

«What's happening here is horrible. They enter houses and rape! We give them sausages, we give them pies, and they... You explained to me about the 'Banderites,' and I believed you and hated them! And now, who should I hate? They [Russian soldiers] rape children! And they shoot people in the legs! This is what I've seen, this is it! If only I knew how all of this would end! Why are they like this, Sergey? Why do they rape children? They come and ask where young girls are. Tell me, what should I do?! My granddaughter, Sonya, is 14 years old. Where should I hide Sonya?! What's the purpose of all this?» - A desperate resident of the occupied village of Tarasivka in the Zaporizhia region asked her relative, who was fighting for Russia under the so-called «DNR» militia near Kherson. The man advises her, «If there's a chance, run from there.»⁶⁴⁴

3. TORTURE

The establishment of a prohibition on torture, including during wartime, in international law is one of the most significant moral achievements of our civilization. *Article 75 of Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 (Protocol I)* prohibits corporal punishment and torture of all kinds «*at any time and in any place whatsoever, whether committed by civilian or by military agents.*» However, idealistic hopes for a rapid and widespread humanization of the customs of war have not been realized. The experience of studying numerous armed conflicts around the world has shown that during hostilities, military personnel often disregard the laws and norms of humanity in order to minimize risks to their own lives or quickly accomplish their assigned tasks, including resorting to the torture of prisoners to obtain information about the actions and intentions of the enemy. However, until recently, even in the most pessimistic forecasts, it was unimaginable that the civilian population of a country in the heart of modern Europe would face brutality comparable only to the horrors of nazi occupation during World War II. «*The Commission has identified the widespread and systematic use of torture and cruel treatment by the Russian authorities against people in the Chernihiv, Donetsk, Kharkiv, Kherson, Kyiv, Sumy, and Zaporizhia regions. The Commission also found that the use of torture by the Russian authorities may amount to crimes against humanity,*» was stated in restrained diplomatic language by the international commission of the United Nations in March 2023 when reporting on the investigation into the crimes of the Russian army in Ukraine.⁶⁴⁵

«*Everywhere where Russian forces entered Ukrainian territory, they were accompanied by professional Russian torturers. People were beaten with electric shocks, raped, had their limbs shot, and were held without food, water, or sleep... The*

burial of tortured people on occupied territory, in courtyards, forests, and roadside ditches, is an undeniable companion to the state flag of Russia,» President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky stated during the Russian War Crimes exhibition in Davos.⁶⁴⁶

The cruelty of the Russian army towards the civilian population is not a new phenomenon. In their previous military campaigns in Chechnya, Georgia, and Syria, Russian servicemen used violence without hesitation as a tool to compel loyalty from the populations in the areas under their control. The tactics that Putin planned to use to occupy and subjugate



Ukraine were similar. Russia and its affiliated separatist forces have regularly resorted to atrocities since 2014. The infamous «Isolation» prison⁶⁴⁷ in Donetsk was, in fact, a torture camp for pro-Ukrainian citizens.

The full-scale invasion in 2022 quickly revealed the fallacy of the Russian government's predictions regarding the support for the «*Russian world*» among the majority of Ukrainians. Ukrainians were decidedly against living under Russian control. A significant portion of the population was prepared to actively resist the invaders, while others refused to cooperate,

displayed hostility, or simply attempted to leave the regions occupied by Russia. The occupiers' encounters with reality quickly transformed their perception of Ukrainians. For Russians, from a friendly people in need of «*liberation,*» Ukrainians became a nation subjected to subjugation. On temporarily occupied territories, the punitive apparatus of authoritarian Russia became operational, and mass violence and torture were always Russian most effective means of subduing dissenters.

In order to suppress the smallest signs of resistance, the occupiers resorted to a practice known as «*population filtration,*» aimed at identifying and detaining Ukrainians who might resist the establishment of the new pro-Russian regime or were simply dissatisfied with its actions. Special filtration camps and detention points, ominously called «*torture chambers,*» were established in the captured territories. According to researchers at Yale University, as of September 2022, Russia and its proxy forces used 21 locations within Ukraine for these filtration activities.⁶⁴⁸ The exact number of «*torture chambers,*» cannot be determined precisely, but in June 2023, the National Police of Ukraine reported the discovery of 53 places of illegal detention and torture of citizens in the de-occupied territories (Kharkiv region - 28 locations, Kherson - 16, Kyiv - 3, Mykolaiv - 2, Sumy - 2, Donetsk - 1, Chernihiv - 1).⁶⁴⁹

Despite the unprecedented scale of repressive measures taken by Russian occupiers against Ukrainians, certain groups of people were prioritized by the Russians for search and neutralization.

3.1. FORMER SERVICEMEN, EMPLOYEES, AND RETIREES OF LAW ENFORCEMENT AND SECURITY AGENCIES

The successful actions of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, including missile and artillery strikes on Russian army facilities, bases, and personnel locations, as well as the work of sabotage groups and underground resistance behind enemy lines, became the reason for the brutal persecution of civilian citizens who had past affiliations with military or other services related to Ukraine's defense. For veterans of the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) from 2014 to 2021, torture was used as revenge against former front-line enemies. In turn, employees of Ukrainian law enforcement agencies and intelligence services were viewed by the occupiers as sources of valuable information and prospective targets for recruitment to conduct espionage among their colleagues who continued to serve in territories controlled by Ukraine.

*«One day, they caught all ATO veterans and brought them to the torture chamber. They started to break everyone immediately. As soon as they brought me here and started beating me, they shouted, 'Greetings from Donbas, ATO warrior!' My hands were tied behind my back, and I had a hood over my head. One of them came up and started removing my pants, including my underwear - completely. Then he attached some kind of clip to my genitals. They shocked me with electricity for about an hour,» recalls an ATO veteran from the village of Kozacha Lopan, Kharkiv region.*⁶⁵⁰

In the village of Lyptsi in the Kharkiv region, Russian occupiers detained a former Ukrainian serviceman, an ATO veteran. Every day, they beat the man with sticks on his heels and the butts of rifles, resulting in his broken ribs. Afterward, the victim was handed over to the personnel of the Russian FSB, who were interested in information about other servicemen, local police officers, and patriotic citizens. «They first beat me with a stun gun, then started using the 'tapiq' [a field telephone set with an induction coil that Russians use to torture with electric shocks]. I had no more strength to resist; I was afraid. Every second reminded me of the broken ribs and

the suppurating wounds on my legs burned up to the knees, which there was no way to treat,» the victim explained.⁶⁵¹

«The occupiers beat people with electric shockers and batons and kept them in basement premises without food and water. They branded two former ATO participants with red-hot irons,» the prosecutor reported on the investigation results of Russian crimes during the occupation of the village of Pisky-Radkivske in the Kharkiv region.⁶⁵²

A man who had served in the Ukrainian police and couldn't leave the city of Kherson due to his pregnant wife was offered cooperation by FSB agents - he was offered to become a chief of the local police. When he refused, they started beating him - with kicks, rifle butts, a metal pipe, and a hammer. Then they subjected him to electric shock torture. «Beating is like child's play; somehow, you can endure it. But this electric shock... I've never screamed so loudly in my entire life as I did then. I begged them, 'Guys, please don't,' but no one listened,» the man recalls.⁶⁵³

3.2. INDIVIDUALS ENLISTED IN TERRITORIAL SELF-DEFENSE UNITS AND SUSPECTED OF COOPERATION WITH THE ARMED FORCES OF UKRAINE

When dealing with individuals, whom they suspected of being potential spies, fire spotters, or members of partisan movements, the occupiers resorted to the most brutal tortures in order to extract confessions of the cooperation with the Ukrainian army and the disclosure of their comrades' identities.

In the city of Bucha in the Kyiv region, a resident whom the Russians suspected of participating in the local territorial defense unit had his teeth knocked out. His hands were

*bound behind his back with tape, a bucket was placed on his head, and he was forced to stand facing the wall. Initially, they placed bricks on his back until he collapsed under their weight. Then they began hitting the bucket on his head, and the man eventually lost consciousness. Later, Russian soldiers took him and other detainees to the yard and opened fire. However, the man managed to survive as the bullet hit his abdomen, and he fell, pretending to be dead. Under the cover of darkness, he crawled over the bodies and hid in an abandoned building.*⁶⁵³

*On March 24, 2022, two Russian soldiers detained a man near the village of Bohdanivka in the Kyiv region, who was digging trenches for the Ukrainian Armed Forces in a forest. They shot him in the thigh and then interrogated him for three days, demanding information about the positions of the Ukrainian army. The captive immediately informed Russian soldiers that he was a peaceful resident and ended up involved in digging defensive structures by accident. Despite this, the man was subjected to brutal tortures: they beat his hand with a rifle butt, cut his arm with a knife, strangled him, putting their foot on his throat, and shot his left hand's middle finger. Throughout this time, they denied him food and water, keeping his hands bound behind his back. The Russians deliberately left the gunshot wound untreated, claiming it was done to provoke inflammation. As they withdrew, the occupiers left the man to die in a cell with his hands tied. The prosecution managed to identify the individuals responsible for these war crimes.*⁶⁵⁴

«In the city of Izium in the Kharkiv region, the occupiers accused a resident of supposedly informing the Ukrainian army about Russian positions, resulting in a school near his home, which housed the Russian army's headquarters, being shelled. For this, he endured twelve days in captivity. «I ended up in hell,» the man recounted. «They tortured me with electric shocks for hours. They attached clamps to my fingers and

ankles and administered electric shocks. My body convulsed from head to toe, and I couldn't breathe. Each time, I thought my heart wouldn't make it. Then they stopped for a few hours, put me in a cell, and took someone else. Then they returned for me... During the last few days, they inserted long needles into my back. After that, I don't remember anything.»⁶⁵⁵

3.3. RELATIVES OF SERVICEMEN OF THE ARMED FORCES OF UKRAINE

For the residents of the occupied territories, having family ties to a Ukrainian serviceman significantly increased the risk of suffering torture. Guided by the principle that «every Ukrainian who supports their country's army is an enemy,» the Russians employed torture on this category of civilians as a preventive measure to intimidate and compel them to abandon any intentions of assisting the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

«During the occupation of the city of Kherson, the Russians detained a woman whose husband was a serviceman in the Armed Forces of Ukraine and died while defending their hometown. She recounted, «When you have a sack over your head, and you're being beaten, you enter this sort of vacuum: you can't breathe, you can't protect yourself, you can't do anything. When they started pulling out my nails, it all became a blur of pain. I wondered what I had done to deserve having my nails ripped out, especially when my husband had already been killed. They boiled the water and said that if I didn't work, I wouldn't need my hands. I managed to free one hand, but they poured the boiling water onto my left hand. My only desire was for my husband to take me with him as soon as possible,» the victim shocked journalists with the story of the abuse she endured.»⁶⁵⁶

A resident of Balakliia in the Kharkiv region spent 45 days in a local torture chamber. He was detained after they found

a photo of his brother in the Ukrainian Armed Forces uniform during a search. He explained, «They led me into a cell, handed me two wires connected to a field telephone - it gives off over 100 volts, and the faster you turn the crank, the higher the voltage. They told me, 'Don't let go. If you do, it's over for you.' Then they began applying the electric shock. They asked questions. If they thought I was lying, they cranked the generator faster, increasing the voltage,» the man said.⁶⁵⁷

«A soldier knocked me to the ground and began questioning me about relatives serving in the Ukrainian army and who I worked for. The Russian beat me in the face after each question, not waiting for an answer. After the blows, I could feel my teeth shattering. He flipped me onto my back and started beating me with his legs. It felt like my head was about to explode. Then the torturer took my bound hands and started hitting my fingers with a hammer,» recalled a survivor from the village of Kozarovychi in the Kyiv region.⁶⁵⁸

3.4. VOLUNTEERS AND PRO-UKRAINIAN CIVIC ACTIVISTS

Despite Article 70 of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, which prohibits the occupying state from persecuting individuals for «acts committed or for opinions expressed before the occupation,» on the captured territories, the occupiers resorted to systematic repression of citizens whom they considered to be promoters of pro-Ukrainian sentiments. Those who endured the occupation speak of mass detentions and torture of civic activists, volunteers, and simply patriotically inclined people, often identified from pre-prepared lists.

A 35-year-old activist from the city of Kherson was accused by the occupiers of aiding underground resistance fighters and was demanded to disclose their organizational details.

The man recalled the interrogations with horror: «They shock you with electricity, and from the electric discharges through your ear canals, you lose consciousness. They give you a rest, and then they beat you with clubs or fists.» According to him, they beat him in such a way that bruises on his back formed the letter Z, which is a Russian symbol of the war in Ukraine.⁶⁵⁹

A 75-year-old Spanish citizen who was involved in volunteer activities in Ukraine was placed in a pre-trial detention center in the city of Simferopol by the occupiers. Demanding access to his bank card, the guards brutally beat the man (he lost 6 teeth), threatened him with a dog, and tortured him with electric shocks by connecting wires to his legs and genitals. «He had scars on his body, and his body weight decreased by 15 kilograms,» said a fellow inmate of the Spanish man, who was fortunate to escape.⁶⁶⁰ The Russian military prosecutor's office acknowledged the detention of a foreign citizen, explaining it as a necessity for «verifying information about his involvement in actions aimed at harming the security of the Russian Federation.»⁶⁶¹

In the village of Makiivka in the Luhansk region, the occupiers brought a woman known for her pro-Ukrainian views to the local gymnasium. She was taken to the director's office, where they tortured her with electric shocks and beat her with a metal pipe on her hands, legs, and back. The victim was forced to reveal the whereabouts of Ukrainian flags she had taken from the gymnasium. Later, they handcuffed the woman to a heating radiator and kept her there the entire day. According to the conclusion of the forensic medical examination, even two months later, there were marks of bruises and hematomas on her back.⁶⁶²

3.5. GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS, LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES,

PUBLIC SECTOR EMPLOYEES, AND INFRASTRUCTURE FACILITIES WORKERS

The Russian plan for the occupation of Ukraine included a «reboot» of all branches of government in the captured territories. According to the occupiers' intentions, the revamped state apparatus and local self-government bodies were supposed to not only support the livelihoods of local communities under occupation but also address the issues of supplying the Russian armed forces, assist the special services in establishing total control over the population, and implement the Kremlin's policy of russification of Ukrainians. Another critical aspect of establishing and strengthening the occupation regime was ensuring the stable operation of infrastructure facilities, medical and educational institutions. However, to their surprise, the Russians encountered serious staffing difficulties; a significant number of officials and workers had left for the territory under Ukrainian control, while others refused or avoided cooperation. *Article 54 of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War* prohibits the occupying state from taking any measures of coercion or sanctions against public officials «*should they abstain from fulfilling their functions for reasons of conscience.*» Despite such a prohibition, the Russians addressed the personnel shortage issue in their traditional manner – through violence and brutality.

In March 2022, Russian soldiers abducted the head of the village council of Verkhnia Krynytsia in the Zaporizhzhia region along with three other local residents. Over several days, these men were subjected to torture, including attaching wires to the tips of their fingers and administering electric shocks, pouring chemical reagents on their skin, and inserting sharp metal objects under their fingernails. In this way, the occupiers forced these people to cooperate and demanded they provide lists of local patriots. The Security Service of

Ukraine managed to identify the individuals responsible for the torture.⁶⁶³

The director of a school in the village of Ivanivka in the Kharkiv region, a 62-year-old woman, endured several days of solitary confinement without light and food. Prior to this, she had been beaten and threatened with murder. All this because she refused to start the school year on September 1 under the Russian flag. The woman was detained while attempting to leave for the territory under Ukrainian control. «The Russians put me on my knees and began searching my belongings. They tossed everything out of my suitcase and found documents. They demanded, ‘Where are the employment records? Where are the stamps? Where are the keys to the school?’» the victim recalled.⁶⁶⁴

To coerce cooperation, Russian special services resorted to mass torture of employees of the captured Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. For example, a 49-year-old employee of a nuclear power plant spent 53 days in an overcrowded cell. According to the man, there were so many detainees that the place was called «the Tetris»; they had to take a long time to find a position to lie down on the floor and take a nap. During the interrogations, the occupiers beat him, tore off his fingernail, poured water on him, and attached electrodes to his ears, demanding that he disclose «informants from the Security Service of Ukraine and the Ukrainian Armed Forces» supposedly among the station’s staff.⁶⁶⁵

It’s important to note that the existence of these «*risk groups*» didn’t mean that all other residents of the occupied territories could feel safe. The cruelty of the Russians had not only an instrumental purpose (obtaining information, compelling cooperation, etc.) but was also directed towards the achievement of the global goal of the war – the destruction of Ukrainian identity. The violent imposition of the «*new geopolitical order*» was only possible by completely intimidating the entire civilian population, who were expected to quickly

accept the realities proposed by the Kremlin and reject the national idea of independence. Torture, along with extrajudicial executions, deportation, and forced passportization, became a means to distort the national consciousness of citizens and force them to renounce their Ukrainian identity. «According to certain detainees, whom the Russian authorities referred to as 'nazis' and 'fascists,' so-called 'de-nazification sessions' were conducted, which involved beatings,» as noted in the report of the Independent International Commission on Investigation of Violations in Ukraine. The presence of Ukrainian state symbols in residence, pro-Ukrainian posts on social media, tattoos with the Ukrainian coat of arms, or mere accusations of being collaborators were grounds for the occupiers to consider an individual a «nazi» and subject them to cruel punishment in the form of torture. The victims reported that physical torture was often accompanied by demands to renounce Ukraine, mock its symbols, publicly praise the armed forces and the leadership of the occupying country, sing the Russian national anthem, and more.

«When the guards open the cell – either they bring someone in or food - you must stand up and shout 'Glory to Russia! Glory to Putin! Glory to Shoigu!' If you don't shout, they'll beat you right away. You must learn and know the Russian anthem. If you don't know it, they will beat you right in the cell,» a resident of Kherson city described the rules imposed by the occupiers in the detention facility.⁶⁶⁶

In the village of Pisky-Radkivski in the Kharkiv region, Russian soldiers used a pit in the yard of a private house to detain people. They were only taken to the toilet once or twice a day. In the toilet, they placed a Ukrainian military uniform, and the Russians ordered the detainees to relieve themselves on it.⁶⁶⁷

A 70-year-old resident of Balakliia city in the Kharkiv region was immediately warned by Russian army personnel that during the interrogation, he must speak exclusively in

Russian. «I explained to them that I had learned Russian a long time ago but spoke Ukrainian. They told me, 'So, we will teach you now.' For every word spoken in Ukrainian, they used an electric shocker. I sat, and one of them stood right beside me and immediately shocked me if I said something wrong. That's how I learned Russian,» the man recalls.⁶⁶⁸

«They made a person stand naked and shout 'Glory to Russia' while they beat them. The victims were told that this was a 'punishment for speaking Ukrainian' and for 'not remembering the words of the Russian Federation's anthem,» cited an example of Russian cruelty the Independent International Commission on Investigation of Violations in Ukraine.⁶⁶⁹

Another common form of humiliation was forcing Ukrainians to participate in filming videos publicly renouncing their beliefs, expressing gratitude to the Russian army for «liberation,» promoting the values of the «Russian world,» and calling on Ukrainians to cease resistance.

«They tortured me for six days – they beat me with a cable, used a charger cable, put a gas mask on me and suffocated me, and gave me electric shocks,» recalled a resident of Kherson. «Then, one day, they entered my cell, unhooked me from the heating radiator, and said, 'We'll take you to the shower now, you'll wash, and then say a few words on camera.' They recorded the video for their propaganda. They forced us to say that the guys from the Ukrainian Armed Forces and territorial defense should surrender because 'resistance is impossible and senseless.'»⁶⁷⁰

Another man from Kherson was subjected to nine days of torture by the occupiers. When the torture became unbearable, they offered him an alternative – he gives an «interview» to a Russian TV channel, and they would release him. «They placed a sheet of paper in front of me and said, 'We'll dictate to you, you write it down, then learn it.' I gave such an

'interview.' I read everything from the sheet,» the man said. However, even after that, they didn't release him – the victim remained in captivity for 73 days.⁶⁷¹

In the city of Balakliia in the Kharkiv region, a Russian investigator asked a local blogger to shoot and post a video on his channel about how the city's residents were complaining about the «crimes of the Ukrainian Armed Forces» and how thankful they were to Putin and the Russian army for «liberating them from Ukrainian nazis.» The man refused, which led to severe beatings. He remembered, «Then one of them placed my hand on the table, put a knife over my finger, and said, 'Either you agree, or I'll cut off your finger.'»⁶⁷²

As the Ukrainian Armed Forces gradually liberated their lands from invaders, the entire world learned with growing horror about the unbelievable and inhumane cruelty of Russian soldiers, who demonstrated horrifying creativity in torturing innocent civilians. Investigative actions carried out by Ukrainian law enforcement and facts collected by international human rights institutions indicate that on the occupied territories, the civilian population was subjected to unimaginable acts of torture and abuse.

«Most commonly, severe beatings and electric shock torture were used. Gas masks were also actively used to suffocate people. Additionally, there were cases of nail extraction and teeth filing with a file. Autopsies of bodies found in the de-occupied territories revealed that tortures related to causing harm to genital organs had taken place. Typically, this was done to men,» reported the Chief of the Main Directorate of the National Police in the Kharkiv region, Volodymyr Tymoshko.⁶⁷³ «Electrocution and sprinkling with water were the most common forms of torture by the Russian military. They also beat

civilians with sticks and suffocated them with gas masks. This was done systematically and exhaustively,» said the prosecutor for war crimes in the Kherson region, Andriy Kovalenko.⁶⁷⁴ *«They tortured people in various ways. Strangling with a car cable, electric shock torture, severe beatings. There were individual torturers who used wooden sticks to break people's joints. We have evidence. Unfortunately, it was done systematically,»* said Andrii Nebytov, head of the police of the Kyiv region.⁶⁷⁵ *«Beating with butts of machine guns or batons, electric shock torture, prolonged exposure to cold. One form of torture involved electric shocks using a field telephone called 'Tapik' connected to fingers or male genital organs. The Russians called this 'Putin's call.' Other methods included suspending detainees from the ceiling with their hands tied, in a position known as the 'parrot pose,' choking with cables, suffocation with plastic bags or gas masks, sexual assault, and other forms of sexual violence. There are witnesses to people dying after brutal torture,»* describes the atrocities of the Russian army in its report, the Independent International Commission to Investigate Violations in Ukraine.⁶⁷⁶

The testimonies of survivors reveal that for the occupiers, torture was often not just a means of punishment or obtaining information but a way of asserting their sadistic tendencies. Hatred, combined with impunity, gave rise to medieval forms of torture that make one question the limits of human cruelty.

*A resident of Kupiansk in the Kharkiv region mentioned the interrogations conducted by Russian FSB agents: «They beat me with bats or iron pipes – I don't know, I had a sack over my head. They also shot me with a non-lethal pistol. One of the detainees had a German cross burned onto his body.»*⁶⁷⁷

A pro-Ukrainian blogger and activist from Kherson had his fingers squeezed with pliers and an unknown substance was injected into him. «They threatened me that if I didn't get an antidote, I would die within 4-6 hours. I thought my nails

would come off from my fingers due to the squeezing. My fingers felt wooden for some time,» the man recounted.⁶⁷⁸

A resident of Nova Basan in the Chernihiv region was hung by handcuffed hands from a rope suspended from the ceiling. He had to stand on the tips of his toes, barely touching the floor, as it was the only way to alleviate the pain. He endured this position for two hours.⁶⁷⁹

«They poured cologne on my hands and set it on fire. They covered my head, put a towel on my face, and started pouring water from a watering can so I couldn't breathe. They also shot my heel,» remembered a man from Snihurivka in the Mykolaiv region.⁶⁸⁰

Ukrainian investigators found that in the village of Pisky-Radkivski in the Kharkiv region, Russian military personnel tortured citizens using a gas mask with a burning piece of cloth.⁶⁸¹

«After the electric shock, they moved on to 'water procedures,' as they called them. They put some piece of cloth on my face and began pouring water. They resuscitated me twice, not letting me die,» said a police officer from Kherson, who was tortured along with his wife for refusing to cooperate with the occupiers.⁶⁸²

A resident of Chkalovske in the Kharkiv region was detained for wanting to see a destroyed tank. Russian soldiers forced the man to walk on a mined field and kept him in a pit without water or food for two days.⁶⁸³

«They beat me, all who wanted to. One of them poured lighter fluid on me and set me on fire. They only started extinguishing me when they realized that they would burn down the garage with me,» said a resident of Hrebelky in the Kyiv region.⁶⁸⁴

«The electric shock was so powerful that it convulsed and twisted the person. You couldn't do anything to stop it. In one

case, a detainee's heart stopped, and in another, foam came out of their mouth, and their teeth fell out. Since people had nothing to tell, they began to make things up,» recalled a man about his time in a detention facility in the Zaporizhia region.⁶⁸⁵

Resident of Motyzhyn in the Kyiv region was tied by their hands to a quad bike by Russian soldiers and forced to run behind it for an extended period. Following this, there were interrogations, death threats, and beatings. Afterward, the man was kept in a sewage pit for several days.⁶⁸⁶

The Russian occupiers combined physical torture with psychological torment, including simulating executions, torture, or threats of torture on their family members and forcing victims to dig graves.

In the city of Bucha in the Kyiv region, a Russian serviceman interrogated a peaceful resident, demanding a confession to «subversive activities against the Russian army.» After the interrogation and brutal beating, the occupier made him smell a dead body and, simulating an execution, fired shots close to his ear.⁶⁸⁷

In the Kherson region, Russian soldiers took the 18-year-old son of a local schoolteacher to a local torture chamber. After some time, the father was informed that his son was alive and would return home, but only if he agreed to cooperate. The teacher was forced to comply. The son later returned and recounted that after his detention, he was subjected to electric shock torture and threats of execution.⁶⁸⁸

Russian occupiers called and forced a 25-year-old resident of Odesa to listen to his father's screams of pain on the phone as they were torturing him at that moment in Hola Prystan in the Kherson region. In this way, the Russians attempted to recruit the young man and demanded that he «provide assistance to the armed forces of the Russian Federation.»⁶⁸⁹

*In the Chernihiv region, during the occupation of the village of Velyka Vys, the Russians tortured a man for possessing a map of roadways found in his house. After beating him, occupiers forced him to dig his own grave while the Russian commander fired shots near his face.*⁶⁹⁰

The actions of Russian soldiers in Ukraine were not random acts of violence. The brutality of these soldiers is not an anomaly or a sign of a lack of control by their leadership. The Russian army represents the ruthless Putin regime and serves as an instrument for carrying out its political will. Several factors, including the systematic nature, scale, and ubiquity of torture, their deliberate focus on specific social and professional groups, the establishment of specialized detention places for torture, the similarity of torture methods, and the use of the same instruments to inflict pain, along with the torturers' belief in their impunity and the lack of a response to their clearly criminal actions by their superiors, collectively indicate that torturing civilians in the occupied territories is a component of the overall Russian strategy of waging war against Ukraine.

«Mass tortures are part of a carefully thought-out and funded plan with a clear purpose: to destroy Ukrainian national and cultural identity,» believe the lawyers from the international group Mobile Justice Team, who assist the Ukrainian government in investigating the war crimes of the Russian Federation.⁶⁹¹ UN experts have reached a similar conclusion, suggesting that the torture of Ukrainians was sanctioned by the Russian state. *«The sequence and methods of torture indicate their coordination, planning, and organization, as well as direct approval, a deliberate policy, or official tolerance of them by the higher authorities of Russia,»* stated the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Nils Melzer.⁶⁹²

4.

DETENTION IN INHUMAN CONDITIONS

The Russian concept of war included not only a rapid advance of their troops deep into Ukraine but also a quick stabilization of the situation in the controlled territories. At the same time, significant problems with the local population during the so-called «*denazification*» of Ukrainians were not foreseen. According to the Kremlin's leadership, Russian military successes were supposed to make the civilian population accept the imposed realities, adapt to the new circumstances, and transition to a normal peaceful life, giving up any form of support for the Ukrainian authorities. However, the events of the first weeks of the full-scale invasion demonstrated the illusory nature of these expectations. The Ukrainian government maintained control over the situation and showed confidence in its capabilities, while the Ukrainian army not only did not suffer a decisive defeat but also engaged in active combat operations and constantly increased its human and technical potential. The residents of the occupied regions understood that Ukraine was resisting and became increasingly skeptical of the Russian propaganda's assurances that «*Russia is here forever.*»

It should be noted that the nature of the occupation varied in different regions of Ukraine. Contrary to ambitious plans for capturing Kyiv, in the north, Russian forces managed to control relatively small territories temporarily, and their further advances were not feasible. Maintaining the achieved frontlines required significant effort and resulted in substantial losses. The occupied settlements, used by the Russians as bases for personnel and equipment, were located near the frontlines and did not serve as secure rear areas. In these conditions, the occupiers viewed the disloyalty of the civilian population as a threat to their safety, and they regarded each local resident as a potential source of fire adjustment or collaborator with

saboteurs. To mitigate these risks, the occupiers resorted to «cleanups,» which, alongside physical destruction upon the slightest suspicion of aiding the Ukrainian army, involved the widespread detention of men and their subsequent isolation in specially dug pits, garages, basements, or auxiliary premises. The harsh conditions, which included low temperatures, lack of food and water, and being kept with tied hands and blindfolded in uncomfortable positions, subjected the detainees to suffering comparable to torture.

*A 73-year-old man was placed in a pit dug in the forest near the village of Katyuzhanka in the Kyiv region. The pit measured 9 square meters and was approximately 2.5 meters deep, and it housed between 8 and 13 civilians at various times. Their hands were tied, eyes blindfolded, and they were not provided with water or food. «It was cold in the pit, and we sat on damp sand. There were intoxicated soldiers above us. After two days, bedsores appeared on me and others due to sitting in one place continuously,» the man recounted.*⁶⁹³

*In the town of Borova in the Kharkiv region, during the occupation, the headquarters of Russian military personnel were located on the grounds of a recreational base. In the nearby forest, the occupiers dug a pit, covered it with bars, and held detained local residents inside it. After the liberation of the settlement, the bodies of two men in civilian clothing were found in the pit. They were handcuffed together, left hand to right foot, and both had been shot in the head.*⁶⁹⁴

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has documented five cases in which detainees were held for several days in open areas or in wooded areas near the locations of Russian armed forces. The individuals were bound, blindfolded, held in pits, trenches, or simply forced to lie on the ground. Russian military personnel confiscated the detainees' footwear to prevent them from escaping, leading to cases of frostbite in some instances. In two cases, Russian soldiers tied the detainees to trees and

*kept them in this manner for several days. One of the victims reported that a soldier had placed a grenade between his back and the tree trunk to prevent him from escaping.*⁶⁹⁵

Guided by the principle of military expediency, Russian military personnel resorted to the practice of total displacement of local residents from their homes and their compulsory relocation to unsuitable premises, with a prohibition on leaving under the threat of execution. «*The armed forces of Russia often used unofficial, self-arranged places of detention. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights documented 72 such places, including houses, basements, sheds, garages, warehouses, and other buildings,*» as indicated in the report of the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine dated June 27, 2023.⁶⁹⁶ Russian soldiers did not burden themselves with even minimal care for the people placed in unsuitable living conditions.

*In the town of Dymir in the Kyiv region, detainees were held in a compressor station of a local enterprise. At different times, the premises housed between 22 and 43 individuals. Each detainee had less than one square meter of space. Barrels were used as toilets. The room had no windows, and detainees were kept with their hands tied and blindfolded. Access to air and light was provided through gaps in the doors. Detainees slept on thin, dirty mattresses on the floor, pressed against each other to keep warm during sleep. There were not enough mattresses for everyone, so many had to lie on the concrete floor. Due to the constant cold – sometimes the room’s temperature dropped below freezing – they could only sleep for a few hours. They drank dirty water from barrels. Food was occasionally brought in a bucket - soup or porridge, which once caused mass poisoning among detainees, but no medicines were provided to them. There were only a few spoons for everyone, so many had to eat with their hands.*⁶⁹⁷

In the village of Kozatske in the Donetsk region, Russian occupiers held over 190 people in a local school. Detainees

*slept on desks, and had no food, water, or medical assistance. One of the victims reported witnessing the death of a detainee due to illness. The man himself, due to the conditions of detention, lost 12 kilograms of weight and was in a state of extreme exhaustion.*⁶⁹⁸



*For over a month, more than 60 local residents, mostly elderly people who could not evacuate, were held in the basement of a preschool childcare institution in the town of Bucha in the Kyiv region. Throughout this time, they lived like in a prison, under the barrels of Russian soldiers' rifles and according to their established rules. People saw the bodies of those killed outside and were afraid that they would also be executed, as the Russians had set up their headquarters in the neighboring building.*⁶⁹⁹

The embodiment of the senseless cruelty of the Russian army towards civilians was the criminal actions of the occupiers in the village of Yahidne in the Chernihiv region, known as the «Yahidne concentration camp» or «basement of death.»

According to Ukrainian prosecutors, Russian military personnel, while threatening to use firearms, forcibly herded approximately 350 residents of the village into the basement of a local school, where they were held from March 3rd to

March 30th, 2022. This group included 77 children, including 5 infants. The soldiers were aware that the basement was unsuitable for prolonged human habitation due to unsanitary conditions, lack of ventilation, fresh air access, artificial or natural lighting, water supply and drainage, toilets, cooking facilities, and seating or resting areas. Due to the inhumane conditions and the prohibition from leaving the basement, 10 elderly civilians (6 women and 4 men) died.⁷⁰⁰ Simultaneously, the Russians established their military headquarters in the school building, using the peaceful residents as human shields.⁷⁰¹

Here is how a woman, who was placed in the basement with her elderly parents and young children (a 9-year-old son and 11-year-old daughter), described their imprisonment:

«We were all packed in there like sardines. Our legs swelled because there was no room to sit comfortably. Dampness tormented us, and the temperature was extremely high, making it difficult to breathe. The children lay on cardboard and blankets on the floor. They were soaked in sweat, lacked oxygen, and some even fainted. The air was heavy – sometimes, the elderly couldn't contain themselves and would relieve themselves where they sat. On the second day in the basement, the elderly people began to lose their minds: they undressed and screamed. They couldn't endure it, lost their sanity, and died. If people died at night, we had to keep their bodies with us until morning; they wouldn't let us bury them. There was a boiler room in the school, and we would take the bodies there when allowed. I don't even remember on which day our grandmother died; we brought her into the basement in a wheelchair. She was 92 years old. There was an outdoor toilet, and if the soldiers were in a good mood, they would let us out at a certain time. If they were in a bad mood, they could keep everyone inside for a whole day. We used buckets for our needs, and then we would ask, 'Please, at least allow

us to take them away.' Occasionally, they allowed it. The soldiers would sometimes toss us their dry food. With a smile, like to dogs. And the little children would run up and take them. Children, of course, take whatever they can get. The military recorded all of this on video. They sometimes allowed us to go home with an escort to get clothes and supplies. Those who could do it would bring canned food from home; some brought grains, whatever they had left. We made 'empty' soups (soups made of just water and occasionally added grain) just to give something to the children and mothers who were nursing.⁵⁵³

In contrast to the northern regions of Ukraine, where the occupiers immediately displayed exceptional cruelty toward Ukrainians, the occupation of certain areas in the Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Kharkiv, Donetsk, and Luhansk regions followed a different scenario. The South and East of Ukraine, which Russian ideologists had always portrayed as part of the «*Russian world*,» were assigned an important political role – they were supposed to become a showcase for Russia's «*liberation mission*.» The Kremlin's leadership considered it crucial to demonstrate to the world the approval and support of the local population for the occupation since it validated their propagandist narratives of «*protecting people from the tyranny of the Kyiv regime*» and justified the war initiated by Putin.

However, the expectations that most residents of the southern and eastern regions would not perceive Russian authority as hostile and would readily support it turned out to be erroneous. «*The servicemen were confident that they would be welcomed as liberators and met with flowers. They brought several trucks of humanitarian aid to the central square, but nobody took it. Lavrov was still telling with great surprise that they offered money, medicines, and food to everyone, but they were ignored,*» recalled the first days of the occupation a resident of the city of Kherson.⁷⁰² Unexpectedly

for the Russians, the civilian population of Southern Ukraine responded to the occupation with peaceful protest actions, and all subsequent attempts by the occupiers to gain mass support from the residents were unsuccessful. Ukrainians did not assist the servicemen from the aggressor country, avoided cooperating with the collaborationist administrations established by the occupiers, and boycotted their initiatives and innovations. Instead of the anticipated process of integrating local communities into the pro-Russian political and cultural environment, occupied territories saw a growth of active resistance, from patriotic graffiti and leaflets to sabotage on transportation routes and attempted attacks on the representatives of the «*new authorities*.» The occupied regions did not become a reliable and safe rear area for the Russian army. «*The civilian population in the captured cities continues to protest against Russian control. Attempts to subdue the citizens through media manipulation, propaganda, and the installation of puppet leaders have so far failed. Russia will likely respond to these failures by resorting to violent and coercive measures,*» reported the UK Ministry of Defense, citing intelligence data one month after the start of the full-scale invasion.⁷⁰³

To suppress Ukrainian unrest, the Kremlin was forced to abandon the concept of «*soft power*» and apply repressive techniques typical of authoritarian regimes, previously tested in Russia and Belarus – large-scale detentions of people and their confinement in places of detention for even the slightest signs of disagreement and social activism. These demonstrative arrests were meant to significantly impact citizens' moods and behavior in the occupied areas, forcing them to abandon protests for the sake of survival. At the same time, the substantial reduction of the pro-Ukrainian-oriented population aimed to diminish the ability of local communities to resist, which contributed to the establishment of Russia's unqualified dominance in the occupied territories.

At the same time, the effective control of densely populated regions required a significant number of specialized units capable of performing not military but purely gendarmerie functions. The problem of the lack of necessary forces and means to establish a «new order» was solved by the Russians using the experience of the nazis in World War II. «*The troops assigned to ensure security in conquered areas will be sufficient only if any resistance is broken not by legal punishment of wrongdoers but by the fact that the occupying authorities instill such fear that it will deter any desire of the population to resist. The military commanders should maintain security and tranquility not by deploying additional security units but by implementing draconian measures,*» states the directive from the Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht regarding the treatment of the population in the occupied territories (July 23, 1941).⁷⁰⁴ Russian command adopted a similar strategy of «*pacification*» through fear. The lack of counterintelligence, intelligence, and occupation regime support units was compensated for by the massiveness of arrests conducted without legal grounds and through simplified procedures. Not only pro-Ukrainian activists but anyone suspected of disloyalty to Russia was subject to isolation. There was no concern for following procedural norms and proving the guilt of detainees; control over the legality of their actions was absent, and confessions could always be obtained through torture. Arrests based on informants' reports and lists compiled by traitors, detentions during street raids, house-to-house searches, or during attempts to leave for territories under Ukrainian control became a daily and widespread phenomenon. «You know, I learned to control my emotions so that nothing showed on my face. You can't cry or laugh. When you cry, Russian soldiers start asking, 'Are you not happy with us? Why aren't you happy when we liberated you?' And if you smile, then, 'Why are you laughing? Maybe you're laughing at us or know something?' In both cases, they can send you 'downstairs' for questioning. So, you have to walk with your eyes downcast. And the fear...

the fear is always with you,» recounted a resident of Kherson about life under occupation.⁷⁰⁵

The number of detainees far exceeded the maximum capacity of temporary detention centers, investigative isolators, and other specialized detention facilities. Those held there were deprived of the ability to satisfy basic human needs – receiving medical care and proper nutrition, having free access to drinking water, using bedding and season-appropriate clothing, going to the toilet, bathing, and maintaining hygiene standards, access to fresh air, and more. The suffering of people due to the cruelty of interrogations was intensified by the unbearable conditions created by the Russians in places of detention.

«There were four sleeping places for eight people with no mattresses. The rest slept on the bare floor. An empty plastic bottle was used as a pillow. I had a piece of cardboard that the guys gave me. At first, they fed us once a day, in the evening – tea without sugar. They never let us outside during the entire period of detention. The toilet was inside,» recounted a man who spent 54 days in the Kherson investigative isolator. He was arrested for drawing pro-Ukrainian graffiti.⁷⁰⁶

A resident of the Zaporizhzhia region was taken into custody based on a denunciation by an acquaintance and was held in a local investigative isolator for six months. The cell where he was placed was very small, but there were ten men. There was a single bed, and there was no running water. The furniture consisted of only shelves on the walls and a small table. Mattresses, blankets, bed linens, and pillows were used from those who had been there before. According to the former detainee: «Two people were sleeping on one bed. Others lay on mattresses on the floor. Some cells had nothing in them, and people slept on the concrete. This continued until their relatives brought them the necessary things. In some cells, there was no toilet, and they used bottles.»

One of the places where the occupiers detained and tortured civilians was the police department in the city of Balakliia, Kharkiv region. «When they brought me into the cell, there were already six men sitting there. It stank, and instead of a toilet, there was a five-liter bucket. There was no space and only two bunks. I spent 76 days there,» recalled one of the detainees. «June and July were very hot, and people felt unwell all the time. They fed us with porridge. The same one plate was passed down to newcomers. They took us to the toilet twice a day with a bag over our heads - that was our only outdoor time.»⁷⁰⁷

The scale of the repressions led to overcrowding in official detention facilities, and illegal places of detention became part of the Russian punitive system in the occupied territories. To isolate and «re-educate» detainees, the invaders «re-purposed» premises in civilian buildings, primarily basements, where they set up cells and interrogation rooms. The phrase «ending up in the basement» became a terrifying idiom for Ukrainians under occupation, embodying humiliation, pain, and suffering.

«In the room, there was only bare concrete, shabby walls, dampness, cold, and two chairs. Instead of a toilet, they gave us a bucket. There was no shower. We were fed daily, but most of the time with expired products. When I opened a container with something like porridge, it smelled terrible. I lost 12 kilograms. Everyone in captivity loses weight quickly. The situation with water was no better. Initially, they gave me half a liter for three days, but then they started bringing water from rusty barrels from the toilet. We all used one spoon, and the water bottles were dirty. On the tenth day, I developed a mouth infection. My throat swelled severely, making it difficult to breathe. After that, they released me,» recounts a resident of Kherson who was arrested for pro-Ukrainian TikTok publications.⁷⁰⁸

A 14-year-old boy who took a photo of destroyed military equipment was held in the basement of the Kherson Court of Appeals for ten days. The room resembled a shower room, measuring 10 by 5 meters. It constantly held 12-13 people. The room had two beds, two tables, and two chairs. Throughout his detention, the boy was taken outside only once. During the first four days, he was hardly fed - the Russians brought food only for two men who had been there the longest. They shared their food with the teenager, although the portions were meager. «On the fifth day, they gave me two spoonfuls of buckwheat and two spoonfuls of macaroni. They fed me once a day,» recalled the young boy.⁷⁰⁹

In the village of Bilyaivka in the Kherson region, the occupiers set up a «prison» for civilians in a storage room of the local school. Here's how a 69-year-old man, who spent nearly a month in detention, described the conditions: «There were 11 of us. Wooden bunks stood along the wall in three tiers. There were no blankets or pillows - people slept on cardboard. I slept on the floor because I would fall between the bunks and the wall. The room had no windows, and the light was constantly turned off. My eyesight worsened due to the darkness. Once a day, in the evening, they gave us four or five spoonfuls of soup. Water was also given once a day, or five liters for three days, for all of us. But for so many people, it wasn't enough. We used a bucket as a toilet in the same room.»⁷¹⁰

The intolerable living conditions imposed by the occupiers were coupled with the establishment of an extremely harsh daily routine and behavioral rules for detainees. From the accounts of former detainees:

«Sleeping was prohibited; we could only nap briefly when the soldiers left, typically after two in the morning.»

«We were given only 30-40 seconds to eat.»

«If any of the military personnel entered the cell, we had to immediately put a bag over our heads and not take it off.»⁷¹¹

«They made us assume the 'stress position,' where you had to clasp your hands together in a lock on the back of your head and sit on your knees, with your heels not leaving the floor. We had to sit like that for hours. Many couldn't endure it and would start moving or standing up. For that, they were beaten with batons or kicked.»⁷¹²

«Me and 18 other men were used as slaves for two months; they forced us to dig trenches, make bunkers, and set up positions for machine gunners from morning till evening. Russian soldiers didn't want to work themselves; they could detain anyone they didn't like and keep them as unpaid labor. It was all done on the principle: 'If you want to live - you must work.'»⁷¹³

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reported the discovery of 161 places of detention for individuals detained in connection with the war, with 124 of them located in the occupied territory of Ukraine. *«In many detention facilities, the conditions were so horrific that they could be equated with torture or cruel treatment,»* as stated in the report by the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine.⁷¹⁴

«The detention centers created by the Russians are similar to each other. They maintain a uniform, if not identical, treatment of detainees,» asserts Wayne Jordash, the head of a team of international investigators collaborating with the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine. *«What we observe in the liberated from occupation territories is a microcosm of the overall criminal plan that awaited the rest of*

Ukraine. What is equally horrifying as torture is the thought of what could have happened if Russia had managed to capture even more Ukrainian territory.»⁷¹⁵



Part III
**The «Black Register» of Cases
of Executions, Torture, and
Cruel Treatment of Civilian
Population in the Temporarily
Occupied Territories of Ukraine**



1.

AUTONOMOUS REPUBLIC OF CRIMEA

In the Vicinity of the City of Saki

On April 12, 2022, Ukrainian law enforcement officers announced the suspicion of Valerii Astakhov, a former member of the disbanded special police unit «Berkut.» He was implicated in several cases, including the abuse of Ukrainian children. Deported children who had been successfully returned to Ukraine identified Astakhov as their tormentor. Two Ukrainian girls from Kherson, Nastia, and Masha, who had been deported to Russia, also confirmed his identity. Journalists from Insider collected testimonies from children who had managed to escape from the occupation and asked them to identify the perpetrator. One of the returning boys recognized Astakhov. These children recounted various forms of torture, being held in basements, subjected to beatings, and even subjected to punitive psychiatric treatment.

One Ukrainian boy, when interviewed by journalists, shared his experience, saying, «...*We were forced to do things we didn't want to, like singing the Russian national anthem and raising the Russian flag. They sent us threatening messages in our group. They kept us confined in the basement, telling us, 'You're pro-Ukraine; you're not wanted here...'*» According to the children, anyone with pro-Ukrainian views was subjected to beatings. The boy continued, «...*They beat us with an iron rod, and Astakhov, who was responsible for our safety, acted as if he were a king. The girl was struck on her back, leaving a straight bruise with a visible stripe...*»⁷³²

THE CITY OF SIMFEROPOL

Tamila Tasheva, the representative of the President in Crimea, has spoken out about the atrocities committed by the Russians against Ukrainian prisoners. She revealed, «...*In the Simferopol pre-trial detention center, a separate block was designated for the detention of prisoners of war and civilian hostages who were forcibly transported from mainland Ukraine to the temporarily occupied Crimea...*» She further explained, «...*I have testimonies from reliable sources confirming that, from the early days of the full-scale invasion, one of the blocks in the Simferopol pre-trial detention center was allocated for the imprisonment of prisoners of war and civilian hostages who had been forcibly taken from mainland Ukraine to Crimea.*» According to Tasheva, shortly after the start of hostilities in Ukraine, rumors began circulating within the Simferopol pre-trial detention center that the 3rd floor of the «monastery» (a separate women's building in the pre-trial detention center where men are also held) was being cleared for Ukrainian prisoners of war. Soon after, reports emerged that inmates had witnessed groups of people, handcuffed and with bags over their heads, being brought to the pretrial detention center, escorted by armed individuals in balaclavas. She continued, «...*They say that Ukrainian prisoners are transported and treated with extreme rudeness and cruelty. They are moved around the pre-trial detention center with bags or hoods over their heads, and hands handcuffed, often resulting in them bumping into walls, doorframes and injuring themselves. Any delays in complying with the demands of the 'special forces' are met with kicks, blows, and curses from the guards.*» The occupiers deported Ukrainians under various pretexts, including for taking a photo with a machine gun or falsely claiming involvement with Ukrainian volunteer battalions. Notably, prisoners are not guarded by regular prison staff but by Russian special forces. Many prisoners have reported physical abuse. «*A Ukrainian prisoner from the Kherson*

region mentioned that in the pre-trial detention center, they used a blunt hair clipper, intentionally causing them to lose patches of hair from their heads or beards ‘along with flesh.’ Any delay in compliance with the ‘special forces’ demands is ‘rewarded’ with blows from sticks on their forearms or thighs or shocks from stun guns.» Furthermore, inmates in the pre-trial detention center have claimed to hear the screams of a fellow Ukrainian prisoner being tortured in a nearby administrative building. Tasheva stated, «They say he screamed loudly, and then they asked him to sign something, claiming that others had already signed. However, the man refused, and it appears he was subjected to further torture, as his screams continued.» She also reported that the prisoners were visibly bruised and in a state of extreme distress.⁷³³

The occupiers placed a 75-year-old Spanish citizen who had been involved in volunteer activities in Ukraine into the pre-trial detention center in Simferopol. They demanded access to his bank card and subjected him to brutal violence, during which he lost six teeth. They also set a service dog on him and tortured him with electric shocks, attaching wires to his legs and genitals. His cellmate, who managed to escape, revealed, «...He bears scars on his body, and he has lost 15 kilograms in body weight.» The Russian military prosecutor’s office acknowledged the detention of this foreign citizen, citing the need to «verify information regarding his involvement in activities aimed at compromising the security of Russia.»⁷³⁴

Capture: Snake Island, Detention: Simferopol and Sevastopol; Torture: Stary Oskol (Russia)

Odesa priest Vasyl Vyrozub spent 70 days in Russian captivity. He was among those who, on February 25, 2022, set out on the «Sapphire» rescue ship to retrieve the bodies of border guards who were initially presumed to be deceased.

However, the ship's crew was captured by the Russian army, leading to their ordeal in a filtration camp, including torture and interrogation. On February 26, 2022, he and other priests and members of the rescue team approached Snake Island on a boat. During this time, Father Vasyl did not witness how the Russians approached and boarded their vessel, as he and the others were in their cabins. Upon being asked to come on deck, they were ordered to kneel, and a thorough search of the ship ensued, lasting approximately three hours. Father Vasyl recalled, «...*From the morning of the 26th when the search was completed, we were practically taken into custody by Russia. We were not allowed to move and awaited instructions from the military leadership regarding our fate.*» The Russian military questioned the «Sapphire» evacuation team, inquiring about their identities, purpose, and particularly why they were recovering the bodies. Initially, the Russians doubted that they were chaplains fulfilling their mission during hostilities. Vasyl explained, «...*They suspected that we were some special unit attempting to capture Snake Island. It was only when they finally realized that we were indeed chaplains, as our attire suggested...*» Vasyl was subsequently taken by the occupiers to Crimea, where he was held at a naval guardhouse for 11 days. During this time, the chaplains were interrogated, although no physical force was used. He stated, «...*The questions they asked were similar to those on the ship: whether we were employees of the SBU or had any association with the SBU...*» After these 11 days, Vasyl was transferred to an educational institution of the Naval Forces, where he encountered other individuals from Snake Island, the crew of the «Sapphire,» and Chaplain Oleksandr Chokov of the 35th separate brigade of marines. He recounted, «*Then all of us, approximately 200 people, were transported from Sevastopol to Simferopol and subsequently flown to Russia...*» The torture began at the pre-trial detention center in the city of Stary Oskol, where Vasyl Vyrozub and others were sent after the filtration camp. He detailed, «...*We were subjected to beatings*

with rubber clubs, tied up with twine, our hands were broken, and we were shocked with electric devices. When the torturers began their cruelty, they added an unusual question to the interrogations: 'Do you possess knowledge or information about the whereabouts of Bandera?' «I laughed and said, 'What do you mean? The whole world knows where Bandera is, but apparently, you don't.'» According to the priest, the treatment of prisoners of war in the pre-trial detention center in Stry Oskol was inhumane. People were compelled to kneel in the snow for several hours in temperatures as low as -22 degrees Celsius, and they were subjected to random attacks, including the release of dogs. The overarching attitude toward everyone was the same: «...*You are Ukrainian, and therefore, you are undesirable.*» Father Vasyl suspects that his prolonged captivity was due to military contacts listed in his phone and photographs from parades and other events.⁷³⁵

2. *DONETSK REGION*

DONETSK DISTRICT

The City of Donetsk

The prosecutors from the Office of the General Prosecutor of Ukraine, in collaboration with investigators from the Main Investigative Department of the Security Service of Ukraine and the National Police, have concluded the pre-trial investigation into Denys Kulykovskiy, also known as «Palych,» the former head of the illicit prison «Isolation» in Donetsk. He will face trial for his involvement in torturing Ukrainian citizens. His actions included organizing interrogations, engaging in unnatural rape, administering electric shock torture, staging mock executions, and subjecting victims to hours inside a wooden coffin filled with nails. Furthermore, 12 additional individuals, who were members of the terrorist organization «DPR» and identified as «operational and investigative workers» within the so-called «Ministry of State Security» have been informed of suspicion. They are accused of using physical violence and electric shock torture on the premises of the «Isolation» facility and the Donetsk Administrative Court of Appeal. These actions were carried out in an attempt to coerce false testimony from the victims. Additionally, suspicion notifications have been issued to 5 members of the terrorist organization «DPR,» who systematically employed torture and physical violence against detainees at the Horlivka Correctional Colony No. 27.⁷³⁶

KALMIUS DISTRICT

The Villages of Bezimenne and Starobesheve

The Russian military detained Dmytro, a 34-year-old history teacher from Mariupol, at a checkpoint when he attempted to leave the city. During a search, the occupiers discovered a message on his phone to a friend containing the word «Ruscists,» which led to him being subjected to physical violence. He was kicked «...*just because I used that word.*» Following this incident, Dmytro and four other individuals were transported to the local police station in the village of Nikolske, where the occupiers had established another checkpoint. At this location, a senior officer struck him four times in the face. The investigators accused teachers like Dmytro of spreading pro-Ukrainian propaganda and also questioned his stance on the annexation of Crimea and Russia's support for pro-Russian separatists in Donetsk and Luhansk. The following morning, Dmytro, along with two women, was taken by the occupiers to a prison in the village of Starobesheve, which is under militant control in the Donetsk region. He was confined to a small cell for four days, sharing the space with 24 other people.⁷³⁷



The occupiers detained Andrii, a 28-year-old marketer, at a roadblock in the village of Bezimenne when he attempted to leave Mariupol. During the search, Russian military personnel discovered pro-Ukrainian posts and content supporting the leadership of Ukraine on his phone. As a result, he was

subjected to physical violence, including a blow to the throat, and was placed in a tent where a filtration process was conducted. Andrii recalled, «...*They began to beat me more severely, all over my body...*» The occupiers interrogated him for two and a half hours and compelled him to record a video uttering the words «Glory to the Russian Army.» Ultimately, he was asked if he had «recognized his mistakes» and was then released.⁷³⁸

The occupiers detained Maksym, a 48-year-old man, at a checkpoint in the village of Nameless. During the inspection, he was subjected to a degrading search where he was forced to strip naked, and the Russian military even checked the seams of his clothing. They questioned him about his affiliation with the «Azov» regiment, whether he sympathized with Nazis, and why he wanted to leave Mariupol. Maksym responded, «...*I told them: in reality, it's you who are on Ukrainian soil...*» In response, one of the occupiers struck him in the chest with a rifle butt, causing him to fall. He described, «...*I rested my head on the ground, holding my ribs. I couldn't stand up, and breathing was extremely painful.*» Subsequently, Maksym was taken to a cell where others were detained. He noticed that one of the detainees had a tattoo of Poseidon with a trident, but the Russians mistakenly believed it to be the Ukrainian coat of arms. Maksym recounted, «...*He tried to explain to them, but they didn't understand...*» The detainees were not provided with water or food, and they were forced to urinate in a corner in front of everyone. When Maksym attempted to rest on the ground, Russian soldiers entered and kicked him in the back, forcing him to stand up.⁷³⁹

In March 2022, a 43-year-old man named Vadym, who worked for a state company in Mariupol, was subjected to torture by the occupying forces. Russian soldiers also questioned his wife because they had discovered that she had «liked» a Facebook page associated with the Ukrainian army and found a receipt on her phone for a donation she had made

to Ukrainian soldiers. «...I tried to protect her but was knocked down...» When he regained his footing, they proceeded to beat him once more. Realizing Vadym's place of employment, the Russian soldiers relocated him to another location, where, as Vadym recounted, the torture continued. «They used electric shocks that nearly took my life, causing me to fall and almost choke on a filling that had come loose from my tooth.» Following these brutal acts, Vadym vomited and lost consciousness. «They grew more furious. When I came to, they ordered me to take off my clothes before subjecting me to further electric shocks.» After enduring another «round» of questioning, the occupiers eventually released Vadym on the condition that he depart for Russia. Vadym was able to relocate to Europe, but the torture left him partially blind, according to medical professionals who attributed his vision impairment to head injuries sustained during the beatings. Upon his release, Vadym witnessed the occupiers forcibly removing a young woman, who had served as the secretary of the local court, from the premises. «They placed a plastic bag over her head, bound her hands, and her mother knelt, pleading for her daughter not to be taken away.»⁷⁴⁰



The Village of Kozatske

The occupiers held over 190 civilians captive in the local school. These individuals were compelled to sleep on desks and were deprived of essential necessities such as food, water, and medical care. Following his release, one of the victims

shared that he had witnessed his husband's death due to illness during captivity. The man himself lost 12 kilograms in weight as a result of the harsh detention conditions and was in a state of extreme exhaustion.⁷⁴¹

The Town of Olenivka

Anna Vorosheva, a 45-year-old Ukrainian entrepreneur, endured nearly 100 days of captivity in Olenivka. She was detained in mid-March 2022 at a checkpoint operated by pro-Russian forces in eastern Ukraine while attempting to deliver humanitarian aid to Mariupol. The separatists apprehended her and transported her in an overcrowded police van to a prison, where she remained until early July 2022, facing «terrorism» charges. Deemed a particularly dangerous criminal, Anna was confined to a disciplinary cell—a system of cells equipped with double or triple alarm systems, small-barred windows, and floors made of welded rods. The cell was so cramped that sometimes sleeping while sitting up was the only option. Food and water were in short supply, and instead of proper sanitation facilities, there was a cesspool. It took a full month before Anna had access to her first shower, and the acoustics of the cell allowed her to hear everything transpiring in the barracks. The woman testified that all Ukrainian



men endured torment and torture. Ihor Talalai, a volunteer from Mariupol who underwent filtration measures and was sent to the Olenivka colony, confirmed these claims. He revealed that he had been subjected to physical beatings and psychological abuse:

«...They didn't merely beat me mercilessly; they employed systematic techniques that inflicted severe injuries. They observed my reactions, waiting for any sign of change as I possibly confessed to something. The barracks were devoid of basic amenities, with minimal communication. Although they managed to fashion a makeshift stove, there weren't enough pallets for everyone. Men were forced to squat for days on end or trade places just to find a brief respite.» Ihor, like Anna, endured nearly 100 days of captivity.⁷⁴²



In April 2022, the Russian military captured a Ukrainian volunteer who had been evacuating civilians to the territory of Zaporizhzhia, under Ukrainian control. He was transported to the temporarily occupied territory of Donetsk in eastern Ukraine. In July, the Russian occupation administration released information claiming that the volunteer had died due to illness and stress. However, it took more than a month and a half before they returned his body to Ukrainian-controlled territory. Upon examination, there were signs of physical injuries on the volunteer, suggesting possible mistreatment during his captivity. Ukrainian law enforcement officials have raised concerns that he may not have received the necessary

medical care, and this lack of care could have been a contributing factor in his death.⁷⁴³

KRAMATORSK DISTRICT

Lyman

The Security Service of Ukraine published an intercepted conversation of an occupier, talking about the Russian military raping women and murdering civilians during their withdrawal from Lyman: «*When retreating from Lyman, we massacred everyone there, (expletive), (expletive) Ukes. We raped, cut and shot them there, (expletive)...*» «*All the men, (expletive), we took wit u, but we stabbed and shot dead all the young broads... everyone.*»⁷⁴⁴

Sviatohirsk

SBU personnel uncovered an illicit holding facility in the recently liberated town of Sviatohirsk in the Donetsk region. This torture facility had been established within a vacation retreat center located in close proximity to the Sviatohirsk Lavra. Russian military forces had forcibly detained local residents at this location, particularly those who were advocates for Ukraine's territorial integrity. Upon conducting an inspection, investigators discovered various items that provided clear evidence of acts of torture taking place there.⁷⁴⁵

3.

ZAPORIZHZHIA REGION

At a checkpoint in the Zaporizhzhia region, members of the Russian military (personnel from the security forces of Russia) apprehended a Kherson resident attempting to escape the occupied area. They subjected him to torture and pressured him to provide information regarding law enforcement officers and security personnel.⁷⁴⁶

BERDIANSK DISTRICT

The City of Berdiansk

On March 18, 2022, Russian aggressors abducted a man from Berdiansk while he was engaged in delivering aid to local residents. They demanded that he confess to involvement in organizing protests. The occupiers subjected the man to physical beatings and subsequently escalated their brutality by using electric shocks as a form of torture. To coerce compliance, they threatened harm to his son and grandson, ultimately forcing him to read his confession regarding involvement with the protest organization on camera. On April 5, the victim succeeded in escaping from the occupied territories and was subsequently hospitalized due to injuries sustained during the torture.⁷⁴⁷

Volunteer Azat Azatian endured torture, cruelty, and inhumane conditions when he was taken to a Russian torture facility located in the occupied city of Berdiansk. He was apprehended during another evacuation mission he was conducting at a checkpoint in Vasylivka, Zaporizhzhia. «*They beat me with a baton and a pipe wrapped in insulating tape,*» Azat recalled, describing the horrifying experience. «*But the most*

terrifying part was the electric shocks, to the point where everything inside you clenches, and you scream, hearing your own screams, gasping for air as if your heart is about to burst, yet you are utterly helpless.» Azat's body was restrained, with his hands handcuffed behind his back, and a bag placed over his head. At times, water was poured on him, intensifying his suffocation. He also provided testimony that other Ukrainian citizens endured similar torture. Azat remained in captivity for a harrowing forty-three days. Following a severe beating, he spent the last 12 days in a cell with a broken leg, rendered immobile due to his injuries.⁷⁴⁸

On March 18, 2022, in occupied Berdiansk, Russian security forces detained the protest organizer named Anton at a traffic intersection while he was delivering aid to the community's residents. They blindfolded and handcuffed him before taking him to the local police station. There, he was interrogated about his role as the protest organizer and subjected to several minutes of physical assault. Russian soldiers then compelled him to remove his jeans, bound his legs together with tape, and continued to beat him. They proceeded to administer electric shocks using clips attached to his earlobes, initially for a brief duration and later for 20 seconds, all while questioning him about the protests and his volunteer activities. Anton recounted, *«Everything went dark, and I saw orange spots... They took an automatic weapon, aimed it at my groin, and instructed me to prepare for death.»* After several hours, he was placed in a cell, where he claimed to have coughed up blood for three consecutive hours. On the third day of his detention, Russian security officers blindfolded him once more and took him to the facility's second floor. There, they coerced him into reading a statement on camera, which they had composed. This statement implicated him as the organizer of the protests, urged people not to participate in protests, and encouraged trust in the new government. They threatened that if he didn't comply with their demands, his family members would be apprehended. Anton explained,

«One man held the text, another recorded, and a third stood behind the camera with a machine gun pointed at me. They made me read it twice because they were dissatisfied with the first attempt.» The Russian occupiers released him after three days of captivity. Anton revealed, *«My soft tissues were severely damaged. I had around 20 centimeters of swelling beneath the skin, and there was a risk of gangrene.»*⁷⁴⁹

On June 6, 2022, in the city of Berdiansk, an enraged Russian forced a local woman born in 1993 to have sexual intercourse under the threat of physical violence without her consent.⁷⁵⁰

The Village of Chernihivka

In May 2022, Lieutenant Colonel Ayub Eldarov, the commander of the battalion within the 96th regiment of the operational assignment of the 46th separate brigade of the Russian Guard troops, was appointed as the so-called «commandant of the village of Chernihivka» in the temporarily occupied Berdiansk district. In this role, Eldarov actively facilitated the execution of Russia's orders aimed at suppressing the resistance movement and conducting mass repressions against civilians in the occupied territories of Ukraine. To carry out these objectives, he assembled punitive squads consisting of Russian military personnel, representatives of Russian special services, and local collaborators. Under Eldarov's command, these occupiers scoured for Ukrainian patriots, forcibly abducted them, and subsequently transported them to a torture chamber established within the premises of the local occupation



commandant's office. Within these cells, individuals endured brutal torture involving poisonous chemicals and electric shocks. There is documented evidence indicating that the enemy deployed suffocating gases in specially equipped «cells» where Ukrainian prisoners were confined. Eldarov himself directly participated in illegal detentions, acts of torture and also provided cover for the murders perpetrated by his subordinates against kidnapped Ukrainians.⁷⁵¹

VASYLIVKA DISTRICT

The City of Vasylivka

Two Russian servicemen displayed extreme cruelty in torturing the local population. They attached wires with electric current to fingertips, applied chemical substances on the skin, and inserted needles under the victims' nails. This horrifying series of events unfolded in March 2022, when Russian military forces occupied the town of Vasylivka in the Zaporizhzhia region. The leader of this occupation was Azamat Khasbulatov, a 31-year-old who was appointed as the deputy military commandant of the occupation administration. Khasbulatov relentlessly pursued and targeted local patriots, journalists, and officials, subjecting them to severe torture. On March 26, the occupiers, including Said Huseinov, Khasbulatov's deputy, kidnapped the headman of the village of Verkhnia Krynytsia along with three other individuals. These captives were transported to the seized premises of the Vasylkiv district police department, where they were held for several days. The Russian military subjected them to agonizing torment, which included the insertion of needles under their nails, the application of various chemical substances onto their skin, and the attachment of wires to their fingertips, delivering electric shocks. During these harrowing interrogations, the occupiers

made threats to kill the captives' relatives unless they complied with the occupation authorities and revealed information about local patriots.⁷⁵²

It has been revealed that the Russian military subjected a man who had previously participated in the Anti-Terrorist Operation to horrifying abuse for a span of 12 days. During this period, he was confined to a cell, subjected to torture, electrocuted, had his fingers severed, and endured fractured ribs.⁷⁵³



The occupiers took the lives of unarmed young boys in the presence of their mother at one of the roadblocks they had established. A 48-year-old woman from Vasylivka was directed to undergo a so-called screening process as she sought entry into territory under Ukrainian control. She observed a woman, who was standing there in tears, and just a few meters away from her, two young men knelt with blindfolds over their eyes, while armed occupiers were present nearby. The occupiers abruptly instructed the eyewitness, the woman, to leave quickly without even processing her fingerprints. As she exited the premises, she heard the sound of gunshots. Based on her account, it is her belief that the Russian occupiers brutally took the lives of those young boys right in front of their mother.⁷⁵⁴

The Village of Verkhnia Krynytsia

In March 2022, Russian soldiers abducted the headman of Verkhnia Krynytsia village in the Zaporizhzhia region, along

with three other local residents. Over the course of several days, these individuals endured brutal torture, including the application of electric shocks through wires connected to their fingertips, the pouring of chemical substances onto their skin, and the insertion of sharp metal objects beneath their nails. The invaders coerced the victims into cooperating and compelled them to provide lists of local patriots.⁷⁵⁵

Enerhodar

According to the report of the head of Enerhodar Dmytro Orlov, more than a thousand residents of the city were subjected to torture.⁷⁵⁶

Individuals were forcibly taken from the streets, and among them, there was a man who had already endured the breaking of his fingers on four separate occasions.⁷⁵⁷

At least 12 local patriots were tortured for two days. These people had been actively fighting against the occupiers on social networks. *«...True, the Russians forcibly took people to the forest, tormented them, and «persistently persuaded» them to go over to the enemy side...»*⁷⁵⁸

The Russian military consistently applied both psychological and physical pressure on the employees of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (NPP). *«...The occupiers have been abducting and subjecting Zaporizhzhia NPP workers to torture, primarily targeting individuals who hold pro-Ukrainian views or those who refuse to collaborate with the occupiers. The Russians are using this torture as a means to coerce Zaporizhzhia NPP workers into compromising the cooling pools' security. The city's residents and the NPP employees pose a threat to the expansion of the «Russian World» in Enerhodar. Based on unofficial reports, there are currently approximately 100 pro-Ukrainian individuals being held in underground facilities.»* The city's mayor emphasized that

this issue is one of the city's most pressing concerns today, in addition to the existing humanitarian and social challenges. Dmytro Orlov stated, «...*People are being systematically abducted, with the whereabouts of some remaining unknown. Those who are detained endure extremely harsh conditions, including electric shock torture, and various forms of physical and psychological abuse,*» said Dmytro Orlov.»⁷⁵⁹

According to Viktor Buchniev, a former counselor to the mayor of Enerhodar, the occupiers have established multiple locations for the detention and torture of individuals who have been abducted.⁷⁶⁰

It has come to light that a torture chamber was established within the underground bunkers of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNNP), referred to as «Energetyk.»⁷⁶¹ Furthermore, there is information indicating the existence of torture facilities within police buildings located in the southeastern part of Enerhodar, as well as underground cells near the station⁷⁶²

One of the most horrifying locations is the referred to as the «Hole» or «Pit,» which serves as a torture chamber established in the basement of the NHU base (military unit 3042).⁷⁶³

Those who have been released from these underground detention facilities have reported being subjected to beatings and pressured to provide information about others. The cells typically accommodate up to 20 people who take turns sleeping and have limited access to toilet facilities. Food is primarily brought by their relatives. When these workers are released, they bravely return to their positions and resume their work.⁷⁶⁴

«They targeted the workers, particularly those responsible for operations, and subjected them to torture, including the use of electric shocks and cutting their fingers down to the bone,» recounted a ZNPP employee. *«I, personally, was forcibly taken away on four separate occasions,»* he added.⁷⁶⁵

One of the repairmen endured over 70 days in the «pit,» a place reeking of feces and chlorine antiseptic. Inside, there

were only crates and boards to sleep on. He recalled that the guards threatened to sexually assault his wife, forcibly stripped him, and made threats of sexual violence against him as well. Although the guards accepted a bribe for his release, he remained unable to leave Enerhodar. Another individual, who worked for a company that installed video surveillance at the ZNPP, spent 53 days in the «pit.» He was subjected to physical abuse, including beatings with a firearm, while the captors demanded information about informants for Ukrainian intelligence. Additionally, he suffered waterboarding, electric shock torture with wires attached to his body, and had a nail forcibly removed from his hand. An employee from the reactor department of Unit No. 2 disclosed that he was beaten with a cable, tortured with electric shocks, and confined in the basement alongside the lead engineer responsible for the control panel.⁷⁶⁶

The Eastern Human Rights Group's report states that the Russian PMC «Wagner» oversees the torture procedures at the ZNPP. Prisoners endure brutal acts such as having chlorine solution poured under their feet in a confined cell, being subjected to electric shocks, and suffocated using cellophane bags. Threats of being «thrown into a reactor,» receiving a «radioactive shower,» and being left permanently bald and toothless are used to terrify individuals.⁷⁶⁷

According to the account of the injured nuclear worker, the interrogations were carried out by an individual known as «Surgeon,» who was of Russian origin. *«He used tongs to pinch my nose while the beating continued. Then he brandished a knife and scissors near my ear, describing how he would scalp me and mentioned that I would be his 28th to swim to Kakhovka.»* Ultimately, the man was coerced into recording a video under duress. Throughout this ordeal, he was subjected to further physical abuse and instructed to repeat the phrases: «Glory to Russia, glory to the Ingush Legion, glory to the Surgeon.» Resisting was not an option. Subsequently,

they emphasized, *«Do you comprehend everything? Stay low and continue working.»*⁷⁶⁸

Prior to the arrival of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) mission on September 1, 2022, Russian security services subjected power plant workers to torture with the intent of preventing them from disclosing safety concerns to the international inspectors. It is documented that individuals who *underwent these «conversations» in the basement returned without uttering a single word.* Furthermore, employees who were deemed less cooperative by the Russians, as they did not fit the desired propaganda image for the IAEA delegation, disappeared.⁷⁶⁹

On July 3, 2022, as a result of the injuries sustained during torture by occupiers, Andriy Honcharuk, a diver at the hydro unit of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, passed away. *«A few days ago, occupiers brutally assaulted an experienced and professional diver working at the nuclear power plant. They demanded that the man dive into the splash pool at the Zaporizhzhia NPP, and after his refusal, these human monsters subjected Andriy Honcharuk to torture,»* wrote the Mayor of the city, Dmytro Orlov, in a Telegram channel. He noted that the victim was taken to the city hospital in a coma with numerous bodily injuries, but the injuries proved to be incompatible with life, and he passed away without regaining consciousness.⁷⁷⁰

Russian occupiers have abducted and taken captive Serhii Potynh, an engineer responsible for safety at the Thermal Automation and Measurements Workshop (TAMW) of the temporarily occupied Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant. Energoatom reports that the man is currently held in captivity by the occupiers, where he is subjected to regular torture and physical violence. After these torturous episodes, the captors send the engineer to the hospital to prevent his death. *«At the same time, they have not yet brought any charges against him but continue to inflict abuse and repression.»*⁷⁷¹

It is also known that there have been instances of rape by Russian military personnel against female employees of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant.⁷⁷²

The Village of Orlianske

Russian occupiers apprehended a local resident named Mykola Zakharchuk from the village of Orlianske while he was out searching for food and water for his two children and other family members. He endured a brutal beating and was subsequently thrown into a pit, resigning himself to what seemed like an impending demise. Russian soldiers even pointed their weapons at him, contemplating tossing a grenade. Mykola's relentless torment stemmed solely from the fact that the day prior, Ukrainian forces had launched an attack on Russian positions. In the aftermath of the assault, Russian soldiers sought to find the «culprits» among the civilian population. On that fateful day, Mykola left his home, hopped on his bicycle, and embarked on a grocery run. After covering a few kilometers, he encountered a KAMAZ truck with a Russian soldier inside. The soldier ordered Mykola to approach, inquiring about his identity and destination, eventually detaining him. Mykola was taken to a house where Russian military personnel were stationed, and there, he fell victim to their relentless beatings.»*One comes and says: 'Undress!'*» the man recalls. *I undressed, standing there. Then I say: «I'm not a military man!» But they don't care. I was left with only underpants and a T-shirt on. They looked for tattoos and traces of butts. They didn't find anything, so they started getting annoyed. And then I understood why they were yelling at me – because I saw a burnt-out Russian armored personnel carrier with eight corpses in it. Well, the roof was blown off. «It's because of you!» – shouted one of the orcs. «Why are your people chasing us? We drove in like normal!» Several soldiers beat Mykola with elbows and fists. One of them threw his weapon away, saying «I don't need a gun, I'll do it with my hands.» The*

man was put next to a pole. He said he knew he would be shot to death now. But the Russians changed their minds. They ordered him: «*Climb into the hole and pray...*» The pit into which Mykola was pushed looked like a sewer. There was a lot of garbage inside. The soldiers shot at him, and one of them took out a grenade. He said: «*Do you know what it is?*» Mykola had already come to terms with the fact that he would be killed. When he read the Lord's Prayer without delay, the Russians asked him to repeat it. «*Are you a believer?*» they asked. He answered in the affirmative. «*Wow, come on, recite some psalms or whatever you got there,*» one of them said. Mykola asked: «*Which one should you recite?*» They randomly asked me to recite Psalm 90. «*I started reciting it to them. It took long. But after that, the commander came and ordered me to be released...*»⁷⁷³

According to the Defense Forces of the Zaporizhzhia Region, the occupiers raped a woman in the village of Orlianske, Vasyliv District. The victim said Russian criminals broke into her house and one of them raped her.⁷⁷⁴

MELITOPOL DISTRICT

The occupiers in the Melitopol district tortured local farmers, forcing them to issue Russian passports and sell their products at prices below cost. Due to the pressure, part of the farmers left the land and drove away while burning the fields. «*...There are two categories of agricultural producers. Those who left and their fields were abandoned, and the farmers who stayed. Many of them were tortured in cellars...*»⁷⁷⁵

The City of Melitopol

The Russian military established a facility within the city to detain individuals who held pro-Ukrainian viewpoints,

especially those who had actively participated in protests against the occupation. These detainees were subjected to inhumane conditions. According to a local resident, *«Captives are provided with food on alternate days, and on the days in between, they receive only water, all while enduring cruel torture.»* The young woman further revealed that instances of sexual assault against men had occurred, though many male victims remained silent about these horrific experiences.



The occupiers, through their use of torture, persistently attempt to coerce detainees into collaborating with them.⁷⁷⁶

On March 12, 2022, armed individuals forcibly abducted activist Olha Haisumova. She was blindfolded, with her hands and feet bound, and confined to a basement until March 21. *«Olha Haisumova stayed in the basement all day, it was very difficult; she sat with a bag on her head, with her hands and feet tied, she could go to the toilet only once a day. The occupiers asked her about the activities of public organizations...»*⁷⁷⁷

In the vicinity of Melitopol, occupant forces subjected an elderly woman to a brutal assault within the confines of her own residence. The pretext for this distressing intrusion was a tip from neighbors, indicating that she was the mother of a former serviceman. *«...Armed Russian soldiers forcibly entered the woman's home, inquiring about her son, who had previously served in the Armed Forces. She informed the occupiers that her son had departed the city prior to the onset of the occupation. Nevertheless, the soldiers proceeded to inflict savage physical violence upon the elderly woman,*

even resorting to striking her in the face with the butt of their rifles.»⁷⁷⁸

On March 21, 2022, armed occupiers came for the members of the Melitopol News: journalists Yuliia Olkhovska, Liubov Chaika, editor Yevheniia Borian, and the head of the publication Mykhailo Kumok. All four were abducted. The occupiers tried to talk them into cooperating with them.⁷⁷⁹

On March 23, 2022, Russian occupant forces unlawfully detained the 75-year-old, ailing (after a stroke) father of Svitlana Zalizetska, who is the director of the «main newspaper of Melitopol,» namely the RIA-Melitopol website. In the early hours of the morning, the elderly man was forcibly taken from his own residence and confined to a basement under inhumane conditions. He was denied access to vital medical care, all while the captors demanded the personal presence of Zaletska. The occupiers' objectives through such actions were to either suppress or coerce cooperation from the RIA-Melitopol platform.⁷⁸⁰

In Melitopol, the occupiers tried several times to gather school principals for a meeting aiming to resume the educational process from April 1, 2022, based on the Russian curriculum. As a sign of protest, the educational institutions' representatives submitted resignation notices. After refusing to cooperate with the occupiers, the principals of local schools were abducted (Anzhelina Kovalenko of School No. 4, Olena Halatsan of School No. 13, Liudmila Chuhai of Lyceum No. 9).⁷⁸¹

On March 29, 2022, Russian invaders abducted 57-year-old Inna Morozovska, the mother of Melitopol city council member and ATO veteran Dmytro Lahzdukals. The occupiers forced her to «confess» to working for the SBU and being an agent of the SBU of Ukraine. Those speaking Russian to her asked her questions about her son, about her attitude regarding his participation in the Anti-Terrorist Operation and the «Azov» battalion.⁷⁸²

POKROVSK DISTRICT

The Village of Novomykhailivka

On November 23, 2022, the Russian military abducted two men from the house, namely Serhii Holubenko (40) and Mykola Khomnikov (32). They were taken to a forest strip, where they were shot, and their bodies were left there.⁷⁸³

POLOHY DISTRICT

The Village of Novozlatopil

On April 14, 2022, a citizen reported her 30-year-old aunt being raped several times by the occupiers. The reason was that the woman did not tell them the information they needed about the village residents. In particular, information about men who had taken part in the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) and other local people.⁷⁸⁴

The City of Polohy

On March 7, 2022, in the temporarily occupied territory, in the city of Polohy, Zaporizhzhia region, personnel from the State Emergency Service conducted operations to extinguish a house fire. Subsequently, rescuers discovered seven bodies, both male and female, displaying signs of violent death, specifically with stab wounds to the chest area and injuries caused by thermal effects.⁷⁸⁵

At the beginning of May 2022, the Russian military abducted, tortured for two days, and eventually killed a 47-year-old local resident, Roman Semenenko. The man had helped the Territorial Defense, being a partisan. Roman was kidnapped

from his home at 6.30 a.m. About 20 occupiers came to apprehend him in armored vehicles. The man was tortured for two days. They demanded that he reveal the places where weapons were stored, the whereabouts of his fellow Ukrainian patriots fighting against the Russians in the Zaporizhzhia region, and information about his older brother, the head of the Polohy National Corps. On May 4, Roman took the Russian military to the place where he hid weapons, where he quickly grabbed a Makarov pistol and started shooting the Russian invaders. Right then, an enemy bullet hit him in the back. The man's mother was held captive together with her son, but she was later released.⁷⁸⁶



The City of Tokmak

The doctors of the city of Tokmak received information about a young girl raped by 11 Russian soldiers. She was brought to the medical facility. *«They say there's no place left alive in her; the girl with glassy eyes and bruises,»* the report says.⁷⁸⁷

4.

KYIV REGION

In almost every village and town of Kyiv region, which had fallen under the occupation of Russian non-humans, in the aftermath of de-occupation, many bodies of civilians were found shot in cold blood (primarily in the back or in the head from behind) or killed in another way. Additionally, many of them were found with their hands and feet bound, and their bodies bore evidence of brutal beatings and other forms of abuse, indicative of horrific torture inflicted upon them prior to their murders. This scenario unfolded in Borodianka, where dozens of corpses lay on the streets, many of them with their hands restrained behind their backs. Also, in Bucha, the bodies of brutally murdered Ukrainians were found on the city streets of the city after the de-occupation. Many citizens had been subjected to torture before being fatally shot in the head. Girls had torn genitals.⁷⁸⁸

On March 10, Russian servicemen broke into the yard of the nurse's house. The occupiers suspected the man who lived with her of cooperating with the Armed Forces, put him on his knees, kicked him and shot over his head. The woman witnessed this. She was held back, not allowed to intervene. The next day, one of them, a 20-year-old Russian military man, came to the victim's house with her phone, accusing her of collaborating with the Armed Forces. He took her to an abandoned house with the intention of apparently «finding out.» According to the victim, there were many used condoms on the floor of the house. The accused raped a woman, threatening to kill her husband. At that time, he constantly held a gun near the woman's body, threatening him with it.⁷⁸⁹

In a telephone conversation intercepted by the SBU, one of the occupiers tells his wife about how he killed the hostage as

something joyful, laughing, in a cheerful voice, and with pride. «...We caught a Uke yesterday... a Uke,» is the first thing the Russian tells his wife. «- Well... Lots of interesting things happened, and now he's in another world. - Well, f-k him. Okay, I got my hog sticker through his heart» «It's not a vampire, Kolya, it doesn't work like that,» the «peaceful» female resident of Russia cheers in response. «I got this knife, sharp on both sides. The blade is like that of Frodo Baggins'. They say, okay, finish him... No way, no, ah-ah-ah, and that's it... (the Russians laughs talking about the despair of a doomed person in the last minutes of their life). So I fulfilled my dream... I wanted to cut the tendons and insert a stake.»⁷⁹⁰

On March 30, 2023, Ukrainian law enforcement officers informed (in absentia) of the suspicion of three Russian military personnel who had systematically raped a 33-year-old resident of the Kyiv region for two weeks in March 2022, threatening her and her 13-year-old daughter with physical violence.⁷⁹¹

VYSHHOROD DISTRICT

The Village of Hlebivka

On March 10, the occupiers broke into the house of Olha and Maksym Manukin. Maksym and his eldest son, Danylo, were apprehended right outside the house in front of the younger children, including a 2.5-year-old daughter, and their hands were pulled tight. Danylo was forced to undress. Olha was kneeling nearby and begged the occupiers not to take her husband and eldest son away. Both men were civilians and had nothing to do with either military service, national security, or work in law enforcement. When Danylo's hands were being tied, Olha tried to interfere. However, the occupiers used force to push her away. The cynicism of this situation also consisted in the fact that one of the occupiers, seeing the

little girl, gave her a chocolate bar, taking away her father and brother. Later, Olha found out that for some time, the occupiers kept her husband and son in the village of Dymer, on the territory of the window factory where the occupiers had a base and torture chamber. Olha found out from people who were also in this torture chamber that Maksym and Danylo were tortured and beaten very badly on the territory of this window factory, especially Danylo. One of the occupiers also called Olha and informed her that her husband and son would not be released and would be held until the end of the war. Already at the end of 2022, Olha found out from the Ukrainians released on exchange that her husband and son were alive in captivity on the territory of Russia.⁷⁹²

The Village of Demydiv

The occupiers abducted local men, mutilated them, and tortured them to death on suspicion of helping the Armed Forces, taking a pro-Ukrainian position and taking actions to destroy the occupiers. Local resident Slava Davydenko, a former member of the Anti-Terrorist Operation, was apprehended and tortured by the occupiers. He was thrown out in a black bag with a huge letter «V» written across it at the exit from the village of Dymer. He could only be identified by certain signs that his mother reported.

Another man was tortured by the occupiers for going to the dam and using binoculars to watch the ongoing battles in the nearby village of Kozarovich. The occupiers decided that he had been correcting the fire. They detained him and tortured him to death. *«They (people in the village. - Gazeta.ua) said they had broken all of his bones, packed him in a locker, and propped it up so no one would find him. He was discovered after the Russians left the village.»* Russian servicemen shot another local resident in the leg and cut off four of his toes.⁷⁹³

The Village of Dymer

A number of cases of brutal torture have been documented. To coerce detainees to provide information, Russian soldiers beat them, tortured them with electric shocks, and carried out mock executions. Pavlo Rudik, a Dymer resident, recounted how the Russians had interrogated him and intimidated him with mock executions. *«I was sitting blindfolded and handcuffed. They said I was done. They put a rifle to my head, loaded it, and I heard three shots. I also heard shell casings falling on the ground... They said next time they wouldn't miss if I didn't tell them everything... whether I participated in the Maidan or fought in 2014. During the second interrogation, a stun gun was used. The electric shock hit me in the back of the head. It was very painful,»* the man said.⁷⁹⁴

Ivan Drozd was detained by the occupiers on the road together with another local resident. Ivan's wife, Anna Mushtukova said the occupiers tied Ivan to a tree and tormented him a lot. The man remained in a 10 below zero temperature for two nights and three days. After that, Ivan began to beg the occupiers to release him, as he could no longer physically endure it. The occupiers set him free and later took him to a hangar in the village of Kozarovychi. Ivan was subsequently transferred to a window factory in the village of Dymer, where he underwent torture like others who were there. His wife did not know anything about Ivan until August when she received a letter dated back to April that he was held as a prisoner in Russia. In February 2023, his wife learned from a Ukrainian released on exchange that her husband was alive and in captivity on the territory of Russia.⁷⁹⁵

The Russian military detained several dozen people. The men - blindfolded and handcuffed in plastic - were held for several weeks at the city's window factory in a 40-square-meter room with little food or water, and buckets to be used as toilets.⁷⁹⁶

Valentyn Hryshchenko, who had been helping his fellow villagers to survive under the occupation (delivering humanitarian aid and medicines, transporting people on boats away from the invading regime, and providing heating for the local hospital) during the occupation of the village, spent five days in captivity. Russian soldiers tied his hands with duct tape, and his eyes with a rag and threw him into a compressor room at the local factory producing metal-plastic windows. It was a cramped room of five by five meters, with a wet concrete floor. Twenty-two people were held there. Among them was one woman, in whose house the occupiers had found binoculars and a small drone. All the prisoners were given one small cauldron containing some undercooked porridge. They drank water through a hose. Every morning, two «Russ-guardians» interrogated everyone in turn. They inquired about Ukrainian positions and activists. People were beaten with stun guns and rifle butts and shot at their feet and above their heads.⁷⁹⁷

The occupiers also set up a torture chamber on the territory of a foundry workshop, where civilians were kept in inhumane conditions, with almost no food or water. «*A room without of 20 square meters without electricity for forty people, one toilet for everyone, and only a canister of water...*» The occupiers later took some of them to Russia for life imprisonment.⁷⁹⁸

Additionally, after the de-occupation of the Kyiv region, the Security Service of Ukraine discovered a place where the invaders had illegally detained at least 13 residents. This was a hole dug out in the middle of the forest. Local residents captured by the occupiers spent two days with their hands tied. This happened at the end of March, i.e., in the last days of the Russian troops in the Kyiv region that withdrew from this territory following successful attacks by the Armed Forces of Ukraine.⁷⁹⁹

The Town of Ivankiv



Following the occupation of the village, the Russian military tortured locals to coerce them into cooperating. Natalia, who was the head of the village's fire department division, was shot dead by the occupiers for refusing to collaborate. She was kept in a dark cellar, in the location of the invaders, blindfolded, without adequate provision of water and food, and having no access to the toilet. At the same time, she was constantly taken to interrogations with the purpose of obtaining information about local people who served in the ATO. Upon her release from captivity, Natalia learned that the occupiers had killed her brother.⁸⁰⁰

The Village of Katiuzhanka

SBU investigators have informed Sergeant Vasily Poltinin of the 83rd Separate Guards Airborne Assault Brigade of the Russian Ministry of Defense in absentia about suspicion of violating the laws and customs of war. The Russian serviceman detained two former participants of the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO). He held the men in the basement of the Katiuzhanska School, where illegal detentions took place.

Under the threat of execution, the captor interrogated the detainees, subjected them to torture, and humiliated them for their participation in the defense of Ukraine in the east of our country. While tormenting the captives, he starved them, denied them water, and forced them to relieve themselves in their place of confinement. The Russian captor threatened to kill the young men and demanded information about the positions of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the whereabouts of ATO participants, and law enforcement personnel.⁸⁰¹

The Village of Kozarovich

During the occupation of the village, the occupiers captured UNIAN journalist Dmytro Khyliuk and his father Vasyl. Dmytro attempted to continue writing materials, including articles about the onset of the war. On March 1, 2022, the occupiers conducted a search at the Khyliuk's house, confiscating their phones. The next day, a projectile struck their house. On the third day, the occupiers returned and detained Dmytro and his father right outside their home. According to Vasyl, the occupiers rushed into the yard with guns, shouting and firing shots. They threw the men to the ground and searched them. They forced Dmytro to undress (searching for tattoos). Afterward, the men had their hands tied, jackets placed over their heads, and were «hooded.» Vasyl fell, but an occupant started yelling at him and dragged him on the ground. Initially, the men were held in one of the premises (a hangar) within the village with their hands tied and their eyes taped shut with duct tape. Dmytro had his head almost completely covered in tape, making it difficult for him to breathe. Later, they were transferred to the village of Dymir on the territory of a window factory. The men were subjected to torture. Vasyl was released later, while Dmytro was taken away. When his father inquired about where they were taking his son, he was told they would release him only after the end of the war. The parents had no information about Dmytro until August 2022, when they

received a letter from him stating that he was in captivity on the territory of Russia. Confirmation of this came in January 2023 from released Ukrainian prisoners in exchange.⁸⁰²

After losing a helicopter over the village, the Russians began searching the villagers and looking for a fire adjuster. Serhii Horhol was apprehended in broad daylight for no apparent reason. *«...After a short interrogation, I had my hands tied behind my back, my ears and eyes were taped shut and I was thrown into a room of one and a half by two meters. There were several such rooms, and people from other villages also sat there...»* The prisoners received poor nutrition. A few days later, Serhii and other prisoners were taken to the territory of the nearby village of Dymer, to the factory. *«...They crammed 26 people into a small room of the compressor shop. There was also not enough food but enough water since one of the enterprise's employees had secured a reserve in canisters. Then, even the occupiers came to take it because they were afraid the local water supply and the wells would be poisoned.»* The oldest prisoner was 75 years old, and the youngest was 19. After sleeping for several days on the cold concrete floor, all of them fell ill. Meanwhile, other forms of abuse were added to the cold and hunger. For instance, the Russians drove a truck as close as possible to the door of the improvised prison and started the engine, causing exhaust fumes to fill the room. Beatings occurred too, of course, but not often. Mostly at interrogations, to which they subjected those who they thought had access to information, such as delivery drivers. Or they took away those whose phones had compromising photos during the search, for example, Russian equipment. Each time, the Russians made something up to increase the guilt of the detainee. There were those who did not agree to cooperate. *«For example, my friend Vadym Kubryk who worked at the time as a hydraulic engineer at a local pumping station. The occupiers had many questions about his work, but he refused to cooperate. They «made a doll» out of him - as they put it. He was beaten, sustaining injuries to*

both his head and hands. After the torture, only one thumb and index finger could be used on one hand and the thumb and little finger on the other. He began to bleed profusely, and they bandaged him themselves because they realized that they had overdone it.» The occupiers shot dead one of the prisoners. *«We heard someone being shot after finding a photo of Russian equipment in his phone...»* On March 10, the prisoners (including Serhii) were taken to an «FSB curator,» who ordered them to state in writing that they would not cooperate with the Armed Forces of Ukraine but would help the Russian army. The «Curator» warned that photos of these notes would be leaked on social networks if we helped the Ukrainian army. On March 12, Serhii and others were taken to the outskirts of the village of Dymier, where the Kadyrov troops were stationed in nearby Katiuzhanka.⁸⁰³

The Village of Kolentsi

«The Russians used address lists to hunt down the participants of the Anti-Terrorist Operation in Donbas. They knew the names of those living here. Some were taken away with bags on their heads, held captive for two days, and released, but we still haven't found one man,» said a local senior citizen Anatolii.

According to a local resident, three young men were interrogated in front of the whole village near the surviving church: *«The Russians caught the young men. They stripped them completely near the church, searching for «tattoos» and beating them. They released him in an hour.»*

«They also confiscated hunting weapons based on their lists. Those who would not give up weapons were severely beaten. Roman's weapon was taken away, but his son-in-law did not hand it in. They looked at the lists again, came back, and beat this guy. He gave up his weapon, but they still took

him away and tortured him. They behaved worse than animals,» elderly Anatolii recalls.⁸⁰⁴

The Village of Termakhivka

During the occupation, the Russian military tortured civilians for 15 days. *«The Russians captured five young boys: my classmate Bohdan, another Bohdan, a neighbor, Ruslan, Andrii, and Denys. These were ordinary lads. They were claimed to be fire adjusters, although we had no connection then. Bohdan was shot twice in the legs and received no medical aid. They were beaten and taken out to be shot one by one. The captors shot into the air, and then they interrogated others so that these, intimidated, would tell them something. The boys said nothing. Then their seniors came and kicked us in the face. They could not even go to the toilet normally because their hands were tied with wire the whole time. Once a man without one ear was brought to them, with a military ID on his broken sternum, and all his limbs shot through. The Russians forced the prisoners to dig a grave and bury the corpse,»* recalls a local resident.⁸⁰⁵

The occupiers did not spare even women and children, abusing and constantly intimidating them. Specifically, the residents of a two-story building in the center of the village were often lined up and told they had only one choice: either walk to Belarus or be shot dead. *«One day, two of their Muscovite guys disappeared. The Russians came to us and said: «The children stay, and you leave.» They line everyone up: women, mothers, and pensioners. They reload their rifles. My daughter, who had never spoken Russian, began to beg them using Russian and Ukrainian words not to shoot because the children were small. The children looked out the windows and cried. The Russians said: «If we don't find two of our own, we will find you and shoot everyone.»»*⁸⁰⁶

BROVARY DISTRICT

The Village of Baryshivka

The Ukrainian Prosecutor's Office accused two Russian occupiers of raping a four-year-old girl and her mother in the Brovary district of the Kyiv region. According to the investigation, on March 13, 2022, two Russian occupiers - Y. Chornoknyzhny and V. Shakhmatov - broke into the yard of a house in Brovary, Kyiv region, where a young family lived. Reportedly, «the military members beat up the father of a four-year-old girl and forced him to kneel and watch his wife being forcibly raped by several Russian soldiers.» Before abusing the child, one of the occupiers told her he would «make a woman out of her.»⁸⁰⁷

Furthermore, on March 13, 2022, these two invaders broke into another house where two families lived and one of the women was pregnant. There they committed similar crimes (rape), in particular against another minor girl. The elderly owner of the house could not resist the Russian military facing the threat of being shot. It is suspected that after some time, the Russians returned to this house and raped the victims again.⁸⁰⁸

Later, the same Russian servicemen broke into another apartment. Besides the husband and the wife, there were several other village residents there hiding from shelling in the basement. Intimidating them with their rifles, the Russian military ordered the men to lie face down on the ground and the elderly women to sit inside the house without interfering. Then they took two villagers - a mother and her minor daughter - to separate rooms and raped them.⁸⁰⁹

The Village of Bervytsia

The occupiers had set up their headquarters in the village club. 49-year-old Anatoly Viktorovych Leyin, who was a member of the Territorial Defense, was tortured to death by the Russians. The man was found murdered in his own cellar, with stab wounds to the heart, liver, and carotid artery and traces of beatings on the head and back.⁸¹⁰



The occupiers also executed a resident of the Kalyta community – a 28-year-old man named Ihor who had come from a neighboring village to guard the tenants’ agricultural machinery in Bervytsia. The Russian military executed him for being suspected of cooperation with the Armed Forces of Ukraine, specifically accusing him of allegedly counting the Russian military equipment.⁸¹¹

The Village of Bohdanivka

Drunk Russian soldiers entered the house of local residents. They constrained the man and raped his 34-year-old wife in front of him. When he tried to oppose this, the occupiers shot him dead. Threatening violence against their 3-year-old son, they repeatedly raped the woman. The house was later burned down.⁸¹²

Two soldiers came to the house of 52-year-old Viktoriia, who lived with her husband Oleksii Rudenko, 10-year-old daughter, and mother-in-law. Russian soldiers smashed the windows with automatic fire and broke into the house. They turned on a bright lantern and shone it in everyone’s face. They put

the couple and the girl into the pit of the pumping station. Later, the man was shot in the head and fell on top of the girl, pinning her down. According to the woman, she then had to change the child into dry clothes «because she was covered in dad's blood down to her panties; I was also soaked.» Victoria's husband was killed by the occupiers because of fishing pants found in their home.⁸¹³

On March 19, the Russian military detained a local resident, artist Ivan. Despite him being unarmed, identifying himself as an artist and not having the necessary information, the Russians brutally tortured him and kept him in a cellar. Ivan spent three days in captivity. During this time, they beat him, trying to get information.

«They hit me on the knees, heels, elbows, and stepped on my head. Once, they shot in the cellar and said: «Wow, look, I missed.» They were intimidating us,» Ivan recalled. Two other men were kept together with him in the basements - Petro Lykhohod and construction worker Valerii. Weapons and ammunition had allegedly been found at the former's place, and the second had been detained on his way from the village of Rudnia to Kyiv. Ivan said he had survived the torture and death of another prisoner. Finally, the man dared to run away. The fate of the third man who was in the basement remained unknown.⁸¹⁴

In March 2022, while in the occupied village of Bohdanivka, Russian servicemen saw a local resident in a forest strip. While detaining the man, they shot him in the leg and brought him to his place in an armored car. The victim was kept there for 5 days with his hands tied behind his back, starved and denied water. He was not provided with medical care after sustaining a wound to make him suffer from the festering wound. The occupiers repeatedly questioned the prisoner about his cooperation with the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the location of Ukrainian positions. The man was struck on the hand with the rifle butt and then cut with a knife. He was also strangled,

humiliated, and insulted. The deputy commander personally fired one shot into the finger of the victim's left hand with a traumatic weapon. After that, the brigade commander gave the order to kill the victim. However, the Russian soldiers, realizing that the man would die due to blood loss from the wounds, left him with his hands tied in the room where they were interrogating him. After some time, the victim managed to escape.⁸¹⁵

The Village of Velyka Dymerka

On March 20, 2022, the occupiers beat up a local resident in his yard, tied him up, and took him prisoner. The man spent four days tied in the cellar at night and forced to dig field trenches during the day. The occupiers also «visited» one local couple with a minor girl. With the child present, they put the head of the family on his knees, forced him to undress, and interrogated the man about his connections with the local self-defense forces and information about the location of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

The police of the Kyiv region documented the crime of the Russian military raping a pregnant woman, which caused her to lose her child. On March 21, 2022, Rinat Khimyanov, together with another, as yet unidentified, Russian serviceman, forced a three-month pregnant woman to enter the house at gunpoint. She was hit in the face with a rifle butt, losing several teeth, and then raped. The victim begged not to touch her, saying she was pregnant, but this did not stop Russians. During the commitment of the crime, Arslan Salikhov was at the entrance to the house to prevent outsiders from entering. The next day, the young woman had a miscarriage.⁸¹⁶

The Village of Hrebelky

The occupiers settled in the house of a local resident, 42-year-old Henadii Viter, where they later tortured him. When Henadii returned home, the house was already occupied. They did not allow him to pick up his stuff, tied up the owner of the house, and put him in the garage.

«...Everyone willing beat me. One of them doused me with a fire starter and set me on fire. They started extinguishing it only when they saw they were going to burn the garage together with me...»⁸¹⁷

The Village of Mokrets

On the morning of March 19, 2022, two civilians were on their way from the village of Zavorychi to the village of Mokrets when they were detained by the Russian military. The phone was taken from one of them and both were sent to a cellar in a private yard to «wait for the commander.» The next morning, March 20, 2022, the «commander» arrived. It was Anton Struyev , the company commander within the reconnaissance battalion of the 15th separate motorized rifle brigade. According to the victims, he began to find out whether they were «Bandera followers» or «Natsis.» When they answered in the negative, he began to interrogate the prisoners to obtain information about the Ukrainian military. He took out tactical gloves and started hitting them. He broke one man's nose and struck the other one on the jaw. He forced both of them to undress, looking for a «nationalistic» tattoos. The beaten men were released on the same day Struyev left.⁸¹⁸

The Village of Peremoha

In February 2022, during the occupation of the village of Peremoha, Russian servicemen illegally deprived 8 civilians

of freedom. The occupiers interrogated the men, punched and kicked them, and used firearms to retrieve information from them about members of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, the National Guard of Ukraine, and representatives of law enforcement agencies and territorial defense. Following this, 5 hostages were shot dead with firearms.⁸¹⁹

The Village of Shevchenkove

On the territory of one of the households, the bodies of six tortured men (aged 40-50) were found in the basement, with traces of torment and gunshot wounds to the head.



«...We discovered a basement filled with blood and the mutilated bodies of local residents, including two brothers. None of the deceased had anything to do with the Territorial Defense or any military formations. The village of Shevchenkove had been under occupation for a long time and during that period, Russian troops abducted civilians, abused them, and shot them dead...» - the head of the Kyi Region Police, Andrii Nebytov, noted.⁸²⁰

Occupants raped 33-year-old Natalia three times in front of her four-year-old son, who was hiding in the boiler room in the house. They shot dead her husband and killed her dog.

On March 9, 2022, Russians came to the yard of the woman's house drunk and shot a dog. The couple came out into the courtyard with raised hands and saw a group of invaders in front of them. «They said they didn't know that there were people here and didn't mean to do something bad. They recounted a well-known fairy tale: «We thought we were going to military exercises; we had no idea we'd be sent to war,» Natalia said. One of the occupiers, who introduced himself as Mikhail Romanov, saw a camouflage jacket in her husband's car, got angry, and opened fire at it. Then he crashed the car into a tree. In the evening of the same day, the occupiers returned, and when Natalie's husband went out into the yard, the woman heard a single gunshot, the sound of a gate being opened, and footsteps in the house. Romanov returned with another man in his twenties, wearing a black uniform. «...The younger guy put a gun to my head and said, 'I shot your husband because he was a Nazi,» the woman recalls. Then Romanov ordered her to be silent and undress.



«You better shut up, or I'll take your baby and show her her mother's brains scattered all over the house. He told me to undress. Then they both raped me one after the other. They didn't care that my son was crying in the boiler room. They told me to shut him up and come back. The whole time they held a gun to my head and taunted me, saying to each other, 'Do you think she'll suck? Kill her or let her live?», the woman

recalls. They left after a while but came back in 20 minutes, and it happened again.⁸²¹

BUCHA DISTRICT

During the occupation of the Kyiv region, the occupiers deployed military equipment on the territory of the Bucha territorial community. The Russian military looted the property of local residents, threatened them with physical violence, controlled their movement within the settlement, and raided their homes. During one of these raids, Russian servicemen entered a house where a woman, her elderly mother, and her young daughter lived. The armed invaders ordered the woman to go with them to the garage, threatening to rape her young daughter if she refused. In the garage, the deputy commander of the combat vehicle of the 37th Separate Guards Motorized Rifles of the Don Budapest Red Banner of the Red Star Order Brigade (the senior sergeant) raped the woman. Other Russian military personnel remained on the street to prevent possible resistance from the victim's relatives and neighbors. A few days later, the suspect - a resident of the Republic of Buryatia - came again to the victim's apartment and repeated an act of sexual violence against her.⁸²²

From February 27 to March 31, 2022, during the occupation of villages on the territory of the Bucha urban territorial community of the Kyiv region, in particular the section of the «Kyiv-Chop» highway, Russian military member Sayan Ilyarov and other occupiers carried out the criminal order of his leadership, shooting at civilians walking the streets or driving in their cars. On March 2, 2022, the Russian military spotted a white civilian car and opened fire without warning, firing 21 shots. After that, the occupiers pulled the still-living civilian man out of the car, tied his legs, and began interrogating and beating him, including in the face with a rifle butt. The injured man did not have the strength to answer the Russians'

questions, so Ilyarov shot the unarmed, lying man in the head. Accompanied by other occupiers, Ilyarov then threw the body of the murdered man into a sewage well near a gas station.⁸²³

The Village of Andriivka

The stepfather of 23-year-old Anton Ishchenko recounted that on March 3, 2022, the Russian military came to their house in Andriivka and took away the boy, who had served in the Armed Forces of Ukraine a few years before. His family found his body in a field on the outskirts of the village on the morning of March 31 after the withdrawal of Russian troops. His stepfather refused to talk about the condition of Anton's body but said they were able to recognize him by his clothes.⁸²⁴

When Mykyta Horban was hiding in the basement together with his father, wife, five-year-old son, and other relatives, the occupiers who had been searching every house, found all the men, dragged them out of the basement, and beat them up. According to Mykyta, they were blindfolded and taken to the field at gunpoint, where tortures began. Russian soldiers tightened the wrench around their joints and turned it until the skin burst. The occupiers ordered them to take off their shoes, filled their shoes with water, and forced them to put them back on. Then they put them down to face the ground, in the cold. People lay for three or four nights in the rain and the cold. The man recalls: «...at first my legs were very cold, but then I stopped feeling them...» Shells were falling very close by. All the captives mentally said goodbye to life several times. Later, they were lifted from the ground and loaded into trucks, and then pushed into helicopters. During the entire time, the prisoners were given a plate of porridge, a piece of bread, and a couple of crackers. They were transferred from helicopters to a cargo plane. His father and 10-12 other prisoners were with Mykyta. Mykyta and his father Sasha were taken to Russia. There they sent prisoners to a camp and untied their eyes.

Many had wounds from torture. One of Sasha's fingers hung limply from a strip of muscle and skin. Mykyta's toes were blackened from severe frostbite; he could not feel his feet, only a terrible smell remained. The rest of the prisoners were in the same condition; some had lost their limbs completely.⁸²⁵

The Village of Babyntsi

At the beginning of March in the village of Babyntsi, the commander of the mobile special purpose unit «Akhmat» - Bisaev Anzor Saladiyevich and his subordinates abducted a teenager and, putting a knife to his throat and holding him at gunpoint, beat him up to get information about the location of Ukrainian troops.⁸²⁶

On March 30, 2022, the occupiers captured the starosta of the Babintsi Starosta District, pushed him into the car and drove toward the cemetery. In order to obtain information about the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Territorial Defense, weapons locations, and mined territory, the occupiers interrogated and tortured him at the cemetery, putting a knife to his throat and forcing him to undress. The Russian military gave the old man a shovel and made him dig a hole. After the abuse and torture, the man was released.⁸²⁷

The Village of Berestianka

Russian soldiers raped 42-year-old Viktoriia and shot dead her neighbor Oleksandr, who tried to defend his wife Natalia to prevent the occupiers from raping her. The occupiers took the women to one of the local houses, where they had set up their headquarters, and placed them on different floors. One of the Russian soldiers, who called himself Danya and said he was 19 years old, forced Victoria to perform oral sex. The woman noted that the occupier «...raped her in all ways possible and said she would be there until morning...» When Viktoriia

said she could not stand it, the occupier told her that either she would be there or go to the boys' tank. He offered another occupier to swap women, which the latter refused. Viktoriia asked another occupant to let her go, but «Danya» told her to come to him, shut up, and continue having oral sex with him. Then, he once again raped her in a lying position.⁸²⁸

The Village of Borodianka

According to local residents, the Russians went from house to house looking for weapons and checking passports. The men and women deemed suspicious by them were taken to the railway station area, where documents were checked, and they were interrogated about their connections with the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Dmytro, a local resident, said his retired brother had been taken away in the same way because they somehow did not like him. The man noted that from the side of the station «...we could hear screams that made the blood run cold...»

«Men were taken out of there in their underwear; everything below the waist was simply black from bruising. They were carried out and loaded into a vehicle. I don't know where they were taken later,» he said.⁸²⁹

An elderly couple spent 8 days in a pit in the basement of their house without food while the occupiers fired shots for several days in the street in front of their house. Before the woman's eyes, Russian soldiers tortured her neighbor. *«They forced him to hold stones in front of him at arm's length and bend his legs at gunpoint without stopping. If he couldn't do that, they said they would shoot him in the legs.»*⁸³⁰

A local resident spoke about her acquaintance, who, during the occupation, was captured by the Russian military, blindfolded, handcuffed, and taken to the territory of their base, where they raped her as they pleased.⁸³¹

On April 20, 2022, the police of the Kyiv region discovered two mass graves with the bodies of nine civilians. Among the dead was a 15-year-old girl. Some bodies showed obvious signs of torture.⁸³²

The City of Bucha

In March 2022, during the occupation of the Kyiv region, the Russian military found a shelter with more than a hundred residents of Buchan in it: mostly women, children, and the elderly. They were held there as hostages for about a week as the occupiers deployed a lot of their military equipment next to the shelter. Subsequently, the Russians took all the hostages out into the street. Children, women, and the elderly were released, but the men were retained.

«They put me and 14 other guys on our knees and took away our phones. We were undressed, they started looking for tattoos with nationalist symbols (coats of arms, runes, etc.). No success.



Those, who were found to have photos of equipment or some chats they [Russians] didn't like, were killed immediately. They shot some in the side saying, «No need to hurry home,» an eyewitness of those events recalled. Those who were not shot immediately were beaten mercilessly. At the same time, the Russians asked about the location of the Territorial Defense and the addresses of the ATO/JFO members. The man noted that it was obvious that the Russian beasts were enjoying tormenting the Ukrainians. After the beatings, they brought a rifle to his head and fired a shot near his ear, following through with striking his head with a rifle butt. Of the 15 boys, only 6 remained. The man also recounted that after the arrival of the

Kadyrov punitive squads in Bucha, the atrocities became the most brutal. They took people away, and their bodies were later discovered with bullets in the back of their heads, their cheeks cut out, and exhibiting other signs of violence.⁸³³

The occupiers captured nine local residents who had joined the Defense Unit and several more, took them outside, put them on their knees, stripped them to the waist, removed their shoes and began searching for tattoos on their bodies. These men were then transferred to a deserted office further down the street, where the Russians had set up a base. The Russians began interrogating the detained men, beating them (including with rifle butts), accusing them of belonging to the Defense Forces and being engaged in partisan activities. According to eyewitness Ivan, they dragged one man out of those nine and shot him to intimidate the others. As a result, one of the men admitted to everyone being part of the Territorial Defense. The occupiers began beating all of them. Ivan and Andrii were taken to another room, where Ivan's hands were tied with duct tape, a bucket was placed on his head, and he was propped against the wall. They began putting bricks onto his back until he fell unconscious. He was the only one who managed to survive. According to his testimony, the occupiers threatened to burn them alive during the interrogations.

On March 31, after the de-occupation, the residents of Bucha entered this Russian base (already abandoned). The bodies of eight of the nine men were found in the yard. They had been lying there for about four weeks in the trash and showed obvious signs of torture: their hands tied behind their backs, signs of beatings, shot legs and stomachs.

According to one woman, every finger of her husband was hit and twisted. That's how much they tortured him and made him suffer.⁸³⁴

The occupiers brutally tortured the local population to coerce them into cooperating and obtain information about the activities and location of the Ukrainian military. They set up a torture chamber and a place of execution in the Radiant children's camp.

A local resident named Viktor said he was grabbed on the street in early March 2022. His hands were tied and a hat was pulled over his eyes. He was then dragged to a cellar, which he is sure was on the territory of the Radiant children's camp. There, the Russians poured cold water over his feet to freeze him and put a gun to his head. *«He said to me: 'You've got to recall what you saw by morning; because if you don't, you'll be shot,'»* said the man. Viktor was lucky that night. There was heavy shelling, and when he realized his kidnappers were no longer guarding him, he ran away to save his life. *«They said: 'Where are the fascists? Where are the troops? Where is Zelensky? One of them mentioned Putin, and I said something rude, so he hit me,'»* Viktor recalls.⁸³⁵

Aliona Mykytiuk, Volodymyr Boichenko's sister, said Volodymyr lived in Hostomel, not far from Bucha and near the airfield where the first Russian troops had landed. A civilian, not a soldier, he spent days searching Hostomel for food and water to bring to his neighbors, including children trapped in their basements by constant shelling and Russian airstrikes. The last time Aliona spoke to him was on March 8. Four days later, Volodymyr was seen by neighbors near the Radiant camp; then he disappeared. When bodies were discovered near the Radiant camp on April 4, Volodymyr Boichenko was found among them. Five men were found on their knees, with their heads down and their hands tied behind their backs. *«We know they were tortured,»* the police chief said.⁸³⁶

On March 12, 2022, Serhii (age 40) and his friend volunteered using a minibus when the so-called green corridors were announced and took people to evacuation buses, were captured by the occupiers. Already after the de-occupation, on March

30, Serhii's badly mutilated body with numerous signs of torture and seven bullet wounds was discovered at the Radiant sanatorium with several other equally disfigured bodies.⁸³⁷

A basement was discovered in Bucha that had been used by the occupiers as their headquarters and a torture chamber where five men abducted in Hostomel had been brutally tortured to death. These were people of ordinary industrial professions who had nothing to do with military service. The oldest was 56 years old, and the youngest was 24 years old. Their bodies were found with numerous signs of torture: numerous beatings, and wounds, they were on their knees, heads down, and their hands were tied behind their backs with plastic. There were many tools around the bodies, which had apparently been used to torment the prisoners for a long period of time. These included many shell casings, which indicates that «show» executions took place. People were tortured to obtain information about the Armed Forces, about the former ATO participants, representatives of state and law enforcement agencies, local authorities, etc. and their families, volunteers, and other local residents helping the Armed Forces. These men were shot dead after long tortures.⁸³⁸

In the basement of the Prolisok kindergarten building, where the Russian army had set up a unit base, 5 male corpses were discovered with their hands tied behind their backs. They had been brutally tortured and then killed in cold blood. The skull of one of the dead was smashed with a rifle butt exhibiting particular cruelty. Others were shot in the back of their heads or chests. According to local residents, men were brought there, whom the occupiers had deemed to have affiliation with the Armed Forces and law enforcement agencies based on the information they had.⁸³⁹

The Russian military dragged local residents out of their homes, brutally abused them, and carried out demonstrative executions.

For instance, during the occupation, the Russian military broke down the gate of Volodymyr Abramov's house, fired at it, and dragged 72-year-old Volodymyr, his daughter Iryna, and her 40-year-old husband Oleh into the yard. Later, the occupiers took Oleh outside the gate onto the sidewalk (Volodymyr recalls) and threw a grenade into the house, which



started a fire. Volodymyr tried to put out the fire and called his son-in-law Oleh for help, but the Russian soldier told him that Oleh would not help him any-

more. Oleh was found on the sidewalk shot at point-blank range (the occupiers ordered him to undress, forced him to kneel, and then shot him in the head at point-blank range). Iryna remembers that she ran out and saw the man's mutilated body while four Russian soldiers who had dragged him outside stood nearby, calmly



drinking water. She started screaming for them to kill her too, and one of them raised his gun. Then he lowered it, then raised and lowered it again, while Volodymyr dragged her back into the yard. Russian soldiers, threatening massacre in case of non-compliance, gave Volodymyr's family three minutes to leave the house.⁸⁴⁰

The occupiers broke into the house of one of the local residents. Following the lieutenant colonel's order, the assailants took the owner outside, knocked him to the ground, and beat him with hands and feet on various parts of his body.

They demanded that he provide information about the patriotic residents of Bucha, then blindfolded the Ukrainian with a towel and brought him to their headquarters, where they kept civilians. There, they kept beating the man, forcing him to undress completely and searching for tattoos on his body. To intimidate him, the occupiers simulated the execution of other persons present in the same room.⁸⁴¹

The Russian military are also known to have broken into the house of local residents, using threats and attempting to obtain information about the whereabouts of Ukrainian troops. Realizing that the family members had an explicitly pro-Ukrainian position, the occupiers locked them in the house and threatened them with weapons, psychologically pressuring and torturing them for a long time and demanding that they give the addresses of patriots and soldiers in Bucha. They threatened to mutilate and kill the man's wife. After the torture, the invaders left the house.⁸⁴²

Russian soldiers on combat vehicles and other military equipment arrived at the administration building of the Irpin Central City Hospital, located in the city of Bucha. In order to intimidate employees and patients of the hospital, the occupiers fired large-caliber machine guns at the medical facility building. Then they blocked the hospital's entrances and exits. Having captured the persons present in the facility and threatening them with weapons, they forced one of the employees to assume the post of mayor of the occupied city of Bucha.⁸⁴³

A 53-year-old local resident spoke about the terror he experienced. Specifically, the Russians gave him 20 minutes to bury the mutilated body of a friend whom the occupiers had blown up with a grenade while he was holding the door of a warehouse where women and elderly people were hiding.⁸⁴⁴

The Russian occupiers tortured and murdered Ukrainians even for having a Ukrainian passport. In the city of Bucha, the body of a man was lying on the street with his hands behind

his back, secured with a white cloth, and his Ukrainian passport lay next to him.⁸⁴⁵

A mass grave was discovered on the territory of St. Andrew's Church in the city, where 117 people with signs of violent death were buried. These included women, men, and children. Many bodies showed signs of torture (handcuffs behind the back, signs of torture on their bodies, shots to the back of the head with hands tied behind the back, shot limbs, etc.).⁸⁴⁶

15 people were buried in Bucha, whose bodies could not be identified. All the bodies had traces of torture. «*Among the dead are 14 men and one woman. Eight men were found in the neighboring village of Myrotske, tortured and shot. There are signs of torture on all 8 bodies. There are also injuries to the head and chest,*» said the councilor of the Bucha mayor.⁸⁴⁷

After the city was liberated from occupation, a horrifying site where Ukrainians had been executed by the occupiers was discovered. In the middle of the city, the bodies of civilians with their hands tied and shot by Russian fascists were found in a yard near residential buildings. Signs of abuse were visible on the bodies.⁸⁴⁸

A grave was also discovered containing the bodies of a young woman and her baby. They were found wrapped in duct tape, positioned in a way that suggested the woman was holding her baby. Upon attempting to separate the child's body from the mother and cut the tape, it was discovered that a mine had been placed between the child and the mother. In other words, the occupiers had planted a mine between the child and the mother and then bound them together with tape.⁸⁴⁹

The search for Kyiv resident Oksana continued for nearly a month until Bucha was freed from the occupiers. The young woman was found murdered and tortured in the basement of one of the houses. She was found naked, in a fur coat, and mutilated. Her body was terribly disfigured: shot in the head,

part of her hand was cut off. «Breasts, stab wounds, signs of torture. Her aunt came and said her nipple was cut off. She was killed with an assault rifle; we found shell casings,» recounted Volodymyr, a resident of Bucha.⁸⁵⁰

The Town of Vorzel

During the occupation of Vorzel, Russian servicemen killed the mother of a little girl and raped the child every day. A resident of the city and a citizen of Kazakhstan, Kostiantyn Kyastutisovich recounted this. He saved the girl from abuse by the occupiers. The girl said that her mother was killed before her eyes being shot in the leg, bleeding for many days, and eventually dying in the basement. The girl was raped every day.

«Drunken orcs did it one by one. I know she has gone through a lot of rehabs and is in Europe now. She will never be able to have children because her body was severely damaged. The girl is the main witness in accusing the Russian leadership of crimes,» Kostiantyn said.⁸⁵¹

A man died in Vorzel after brutal rape and abuse. This was announced by Anatolii Fedoruk, the mayor of Bucha, a city neighboring Vorzel. The victim worked as a security guard at the Orliatko children's sanatorium. *«He is already 'Cargo 200.' [dead – ed.] He could not endure the torture and died,»* Anatolii Fedoruk said.⁸⁵²

The Russian occupier raped a baby on the occupied territory. The terrible crime became known thanks to social networks. The rapist, who introduced himself to the camera as Aleksei Bychkov, shot a «fierce video,» as he put it himself. The occupant rubs the eyelash brush between the baby's buttocks with sadistic pleasure, licks the brush and runs it over his face. On the recording, you can hear the child start to cry. In a video address to the Lithuanian Parliament on April 12, 2022,

President Volodymyr Zelensky confirmed that this crime was committed by a Russian military member from Pskov named Bychkov.⁸⁵³

The Village of Havronshchyna

In March 2022, soldiers of the Russian Armed Forces, while in the temporarily occupied village of Havronshchyna, brutally abused a local resident by inflicting bodily injuries, threatening him with a firearm, and tying his hands and feet with a rope. Furthermore, the man was stripped, buried in cold soil, and deprived of water, food, and clothing. The invaders kept the Ukrainian without outerwear in a pit in the open air for several days.⁸⁵⁴

A Russian soldier is also known to have stopped an unarmed local civilian on the street who posed no threat to him. Intimidating him with a weapon, he forced the man to lie on the ground and beat him, asking about his membership in the Armed Forces of Ukraine and other military or public



formations. After the beatings, he placed the victim against the wall and killed him with a shot to the head from an automatic weapon. Later, this occupier in a state of alcoholic intoxication and his colleagues entered the house where civilians lived and ordered the four persons present to go to one room. He held the victims at gunpoint for a long time and interrogated them. Then he ordered everyone to line up one by one, arguing he did not want to waste extra ammunition on them. After that, imitating the execution of unarmed civilians, he fired a shot into the ceiling and left the house, promising to come the next day and shoot everyone.⁸⁵⁵

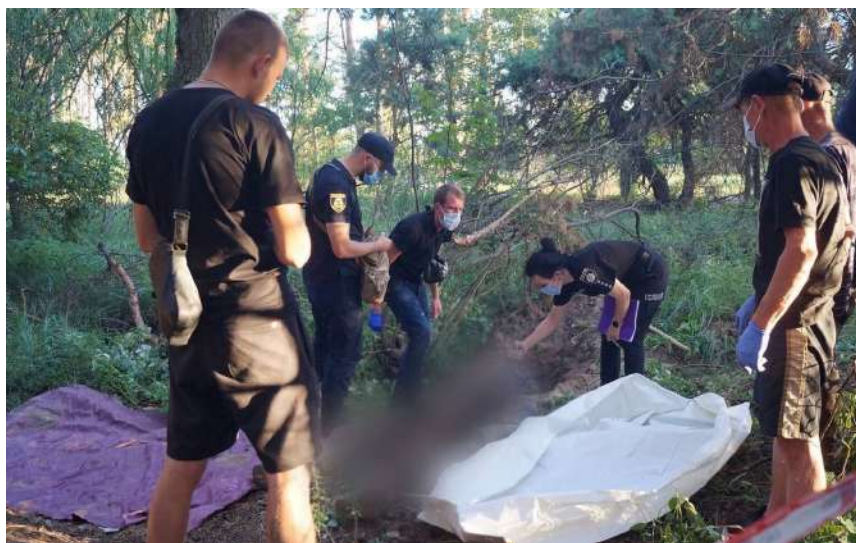
Between the Villages of Horenka and Moshchun

After the liberation of Kyiv region, between the villages of Horenka and Moshchun, in a forest strip, the body of a civilian, tortured and killed by the occupiers, was discovered. It was barely buried with soil, the victim's eyes and legs were wrapped in adhesive tape, and the hands were bound with a construction clamp.⁸⁵⁶

The Settlement of Hostomel

During the temporary seizure of Hostomel in March, the Russian military conducted illegal searches of buildings. They broke down doors, smashed windows, and searched for servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and law enforcement officers. In one of the houses, they threatened civilians with weapons and forced them to undress completely. Later, people were kept in the basement without food and water, beaten with rifle butts on the ribs and legs, and threatened with weapons and simulated execution.⁸⁵⁷

In the Kyiv region, the occupiers held women and children captive as «human shields» in basements and hostels. According to journalist Zoia K., two-year-old Zlata, 15-year-old



Dima, along with her neighbors and acquaintances from the town, were detained in a Hostomel basement without any proper living conditions.⁸⁵⁸

The occupiers also kept civilians in cold rooms. According to witness testimony (08:20), 24 people were being kept in one cell, and 28 people in the neighboring cell. People spent almost two and a half weeks there. After that, they were taken to Belarus and then to Russia's Bryansk region. A total of 52 people were held in the refrigerating chambers.⁸⁵⁹

The Village of Zdvyzhivka

After the liberation of the Kyiv region, the bodies of men severely tortured by the occupiers were discovered in a building in the village of Zdvyzhivka. The hands of the deceased were tied behind their backs, and their eyes were blindfolded. There were probably traces of burns and cuts on the bodies, including deep ones. Also, local residents said that in order to coerce people into cooperating, the occupiers distributed leaflets with absurd content about the Russians not wanting

this war but coming to fight against nationalists that made Ukraine the «poorest country in Europe.»⁸⁶⁰ The bodies of tortured civilians were also found at the former positions of the Russian army.⁸⁶¹

In a foxhole on the outskirts of the village, local residents found the bodies of two tortured men - Pavlo Kholodenko and Viktor Balai, former ATO members. Their hands were tied behind their backs and both men had head injuries. The face and head of one of them were wrapped with duct tape.⁸⁶²

The City of Irpin

Throughout March 2022, Russian military personnel conducted special raids in the city. They treated the civilian population cruelly, offensively and humiliatingly, trying to identify patriotic citizens of Ukraine.

They found two civilians on the territory of the Irpin military hospital and interrogated them. As they did not get the information they wanted, the men were ordered to kneel and put their heads together. Then several shots were fired over their heads to intimidate them. Later, the occupiers broke into a residential building with two civilians in it and hit the house owner on the body and head. Simulating an execution, the Russian military fired shots next to his head. The man was taken to the yard of the house for questioning, where an occupier pointed an automatic weapon at the victim allegedly due to failure to provide «true information.» Simulating a shooting, he fired two rounds of shots from both sides of the victim, causing him severe moral and mental suffering.⁸⁶³

During another raid, a photo of a woman's son serving in the Armed Forces was found in her mobile phone. In order to inflict severe moral and mental suffering on the woman, the Russian soldier pointed an automatic weapon at the woman's head and simulated a shooting by pressing the trigger with his finger.⁸⁶⁴

During the so-called «sweeping,» the Russian military broke into one of the houses not far from the headquarters they had set up in one of the private houses and found two local residents in it. Holding them at gunpoint, the occupiers restricted the movement of the locals and ordered them to undress. *«For reasons of intolerance toward Ukrainians, the Russian military stripped, beat, and interrogated them. It happened to be a guard and a gardener working on the territory of this household. Later, one of the servicemen put a gun to the victim's head and fired several shots near his ear, simulating a shooting. People begged them not to touch them, assuring them they were civilians not taking part in hostilities. At the moment, Russian servicemen took them out into the street, where they continued to beat them, knocking them to the ground and simulating a shooting at one of the victims using a rifle while he was lying on the ground.»* After tormenting the local residents, the occupiers forbade them to leave the house or otherwise they would be shot immediately. Therefore, civilians were deprived of the opportunity to move and get water and food.⁸⁶⁵

The Village of Kalynivka

An unauthorized burial of two men with traces of torture was discovered in the territory of the village of Kalynivka of the Makariv amalgamated territorial community. According to preliminary information, during the occupation of the settlement, Russian servicemen tortured and killed two civilians. The hands of the deceased had torn nails and were tied behind their backs, and gunshot wounds were found on their bodies.⁸⁶⁶

The Village of Lypivka

The occupiers held more than 20 people hostage in the dormitory of the village of Lypivka, Makariv district. Some of them were brutally beaten. This happened to the men on their way home to the Khmelnytskyi region who came across the Russian military. One of the hostages, when she finally contacted her son, informed him they were told that they would be used as human shields. One man was released from this dormitory, instructed to find the Makariv city leadership and suggest that they come out with a white flag.⁸⁶⁶

The Village of Myrotske

A mass grave containing the bodies of seven civilians who had been tortured and brutally executed by gunshot wounds to the head was discovered at Russian military positions during the occupation of the territory. Many victims had their hands tied and their knees shot.⁸⁶⁷

On April 29, a pit with the bodies of three men was found on the territory of the Bucha district, tortured by the occupiers and then brutally killed. The burial place was discovered in the forest near the village of Myrotske. The head of the Kyiv region police, Andrii Nebytov, reported the terrible details: «...*The victims had been tortured for a long time because all their clothes were covered in blood. Their limbs had bullet wounds. The victims' hands were tied, a cloth was wrapped around their faces, and some had gags in their mouths. Finally, each of the men was shot in the ear...*»⁸⁶⁸

Additionally, in one pit near the dugouts of Russian soldiers, the police of the Kyiv region discovered the bodies of two men bearing traces of torture. «*The body of a man was found with his hands tied, a cap pulled over his face, and tape tied around his neck. Eyeglasses were found in the deceased's pocket. The second person killed was wearing a khaki fleece*

jacket with chevrons of the SBU National Academy. The man had a gold wedding ring on his ring finger,» said the head of the National Police Department in the Kyiv Region.⁸⁶⁹

The occupiers tortured Oleksandr, the nephew of Olena and Dmytro, and then executed him just because he lived on the street where the occupiers were camped and wore black. In their opinion, only Russian policemen could wear black. *«His hands were tied behind, and he was shot in the head. His eyes had fallen out,»* Olena said.⁸⁷⁰

(Exact Location Not Specified) In the Vicinity of Myrotske

The husband, Valery Ivanovich, went on foot from Buchi to look for his wife and son 11 kilometers from home. He passed 4 roadblocks but was detained, put on twine, tied to an armored personnel carrier, and executed. Then they undressed, examined for tattoos, and then put them in a crypt, where there were already 6 women, 3 children, and 2 men. Valery stayed there for 2 hours, then he was transferred to a shed. The next day after the interrogation, he was released.⁸⁷¹

The Village of Motyzhyn

According to the information from the Security Service of Ukraine, the Russians killed more than 30 of this settlement's residents during the month of occupation. Among the tortured was the family of the village head Olha Sukhenko. On March 23, 2022, the invaders apprehended the woman who had taken care



of fellow villagers by helping people flee the occupation and delivering medicine and food. Her husband Ihor and son Oleksandr were also taken away. On April 3, the family was found bearing traces of brutal torture in a mass grave in a forest outside the village. There were signs of brutal torture on the bodies, including broken limbs, torn nails,



pierced skulls, and multiple gunshot wounds. According to the Security Service of Ukraine, the occupiers tried to obtain information about the location of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and Territorial Defense members from the village head and her relatives. The executioners shot the son in the leg in front of his mother. They obtained no information, so they shot him in the head. Olha Sukhenko's husband was also tortured. They buried Sukhenko and another man near the dugout, in which the Russians had set up a torture chamber.⁸⁷²

A woman was shot by the occupiers for wearing dark clothes. Then, her father was captured and held in a barn for a long time, blindfolded and handcuffed and without food or water.⁸⁷³

According to the Security Service of Ukraine, the death of two members of the public organization «Patriot» has been documented. These were two volunteers delivering humanitarian aid to the residents of Motyzhyn. After the occupiers interrogated and tortured them, they took them to a forest strip and ordered them to run away, opening fire on them. One of the volunteers died from a head shot, and the other was seriously wounded. The occupiers seized the cars and humanitarian aid.⁸⁷⁴

The Russian military detained a local resident, constrained his hands, tied him to a quad bike and forced him to run for nearly one kilometer in this way. After interrogations, death threats, and beatings, he was kept in a sewage pit for several days.⁸⁷⁵

The Village of Moshchun

The occupiers tortured an elderly man in a forest near the village of Moshchun. His body was tied to a tree, and his hands were tied behind the tree with a plastic cord. There were traces of severe beatings on the body.⁸⁷⁶

The Village of Nove Zalissia

The occupiers brutally tortured a civilian in Novt Zalissia. After the liberation, the mutilated body was discovered next to the former Russian army positions. The hands of the deceased were tied with a rope to a fastening point using an iron carabiner of a towing cable, which was also wrapped around the neck of the deceased. According to law enforcement agencies, everything indicates the man was strangled before his death.⁸⁷⁷

The Village of Novyi Korohod

The occupiers tortured and killed a 46-year-old man named Viktor. His body was found with a piece of white plastic tied behind his back. He was shot in the head.⁸⁷⁸

The Village of Ozera

In order to coerce him into cooperating, the occupiers kidnapped the head of the village of Ozera, Vadym Martynov.

They put a bag on his head, tied his hands behind his back, and took him to a room they referred to as their commandant's office. During the interrogation, they attempted to force the village head to collaborate with them. After his refusal, the occupiers hung him «in the position of a swallow» and kept him hanging: «let him hang until the morning to ripen.»⁸⁷⁹



5. **LUHANSK REGION**

The occupiers publicly hanged five Ukrainians for their ties with Ukraine. They had plates around their necks with inscriptions by the occupiers. Those were mostly offensive words and accusations of cooperation with Ukrainian special services.⁸⁸⁰

SVATOVE DISTRICT

The Village of Makiivka

Russian soldiers detained a local resident who held pro-Ukrainian views. They brought her to the local gymnasium and put her in the principal's office, where she was subjected to an electric shock and beaten with a metal-plastic pipe on her arms, legs, and back. They demanded that the victim say where she had hidden the Ukrainian flags that she had taken from the gymnasium. Then the woman was handcuffed to a heating battery and kept like that all day. Per the forensic examination's conclusion, signs of bruising and hemorrhages remained on her back even after two months.⁸⁸¹

The Village of Nyzhnia Duvanka

Russian soldiers tortured and then executed a local resident holding a pro-Ukrainian position. «...*The occupiers hanged a man in Svativshchyna. He held a clearly pro-Ukrainian position. Russian inhumans constantly pressured and interrogated him. They wanted to break him. However, the Svativshchyna resident did not change his views and waited for liberation. He was executed in his native Nyzhnia Duvanka,*» said the head of the Luhansk RMA.⁸⁸²

SIEVIERODONETSK DISTRICT

The City of Kreminna

The Russian military kept local people they suspected of «cooperating with Ukraine» on a farm in Kreminna. According to the report of the Luhansk RMA: «...*The occupiers continue to detain the local population holding different views or simply not liking them. People disappear in an unknown direction and often do not return. One of the places where Ukrainians are kept is the territory of the former animal farm near Kreminna. According to witness reports, some of the people have been detained in the Svativ area on suspicion of cooperation with Ukraine.*»⁸⁸³

The City of Rubizhne

As reported by the head of the Luhansk RMA, Russian invaders abducted children from Rubizhne to force their mothers to become «spies.» In case of refusal, they threatened to shoot the children. «...*The orcs steal children and force mothers to go to the positions of the Ukrainian military as if to get humanitarian aid and take some humanitarian kits or just products, and then go back and tell [the enemy] how the positions of the Ukrainian defenders are equipped. If women don't do this, they threaten to shoot their children.*»⁸⁸⁴

STAROBILSK DISTRICT

The City of Starobilsk

According to Valerii Novikov, Chairman of the Board of the Luhansk Regional Human Rights Center «Alternative,» the

occupiers created the so-called «jails» within Starobilsk, i.e., small premises where they kept people, including Ukrainian patriots and soldiers: «... At the beginning, they apprehended everyone there and applied torture, such as pouring cold water over them, as was the case in early March. I won't share the details, but people were really tortured, and we know about dozens of such people. Not hundreds, not thousands, as in the Donetsk region, but specifically this happened in Starobilsk...»⁸⁸⁵.



6. *MYKOLAIV REGION*

BASHTAN DISTRICT

Since the beginning of the occupation of the Bashtan district in the Mykolaiv region, the commander of one of the regiments of the so-called «DPR» headed the «military commandant's office» in the occupied village. Under his orders, subordinate military personnel illegally detained civilians, looking for people with an active civic position. The occupiers, in a premeditated conspiracy, detained four civilians, among whom were former servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. They demanded information from the men about the location of defense forces and their service in the Ukrainian Armed Forces. They also pressured them to collaborate with the enemy. During the unlawful detention of civilians, they subjected them to systematic beatings, including the use of sexual violence. They were threatened with massacre, and kept in inhumane conditions, including in a cold utility room and cellar without access to fresh air, food, and water, and in unsanitary conditions.⁸⁸⁶

At the beginning of March 2022, during the occupation of one of the villages of the Bashtan district, Russian servicemen carried out filtering measures and checked all the inhabitants of the village. During an inspection of one of the houses, a Russian soldier raped a 31-year-old woman, threatening her and her child with violence.⁸⁸⁷

The Village of Lotskyne

60-year-old Serhii Bozhko was tortured by Russian servicemen for two days in one of the rooms of a two-story residential building, being accused of loyalty toward the Ukrainian

army and of stealing Russian weapons. The occupiers shot him in the elbow to reveal the whereabouts of a machine gun. However, the man did not have any machine gun; he only had a few cartridges. The occupiers did not allow him to receive medical care and took him to one of their headquarters. The man died from numerous injuries. His body was found in one of the pits on the outskirts



of the village near the DPR headquarters: *«His body position was like this: ...one arm bent to one side, raised, and the other one sprawled to the side; legs too. He was thrown into this pit, shot dead here and then they threw a mattress on top of him and covered him with soil... The man's whole face was mutilated; his hands and body were bruised and had gunshot marks...»*⁸⁸⁸

The Village fo Novopetrivka

According to the Prosecutor's Office, after the liberation of the village, the bodies of three tortured local residents were discovered. The villagers said the tortured men were 39, 42 and 55 years old. It has already been established that they were tortured before their death and then killed with firearms.⁸⁸⁹

The Village of Novofontanka

On the territory of the village of Novofontanka of the Bashtan district, the bodies of two local residents with signs of gunshot wounds and torture were discovered in a common grave. One of the men had his legs tied. There were also traces of the Russian military nearby, in particular fragments of typical Russian dry rations.⁸⁹⁰

The City of Snihurivka

Russian torture chambers were discovered in Snihurivka, Mykolaiv region after it was liberated from the occupiers. One of them was located in the destroyed building of the city police department. There was another torture chamber in a local restaurant. Those who lived in high-rise buildings in the vicinity of these premises had to move to relatives on other streets to stop hearing the screams of people being tortured. Civilians were detained and abused there. According to Ivan Kukhta, the head of the Snihuriv city military administration, there were many instances of torture. Many were taken to Kherson and Kakhovka. After the liberation, tortured people began to be discovered, and there was an understanding of where the mass graves would be. «...*There are many stories and they're all similar, all about destruction and harassment. The Russians would tell the people of Snihuriv: «Mykolaiv is about to fall, we will take Odesa, and we will take Kyiv...»*»⁸⁹¹

On April 6, 2022, Russian security forces detained Yurii, a Baptist pastor, at a checkpoint in Snihurivka near the administrative border with the Kherson region where he was buying food, medications, and other necessary things for the Kherson community. After finding several photos of Russian military equipment in his phone he had made in the first days of the invasion, he was taken to a detention center. Yurii was kept for six days in a small chiller without electricity and almost without food and water. The man was questioned about his participation in the protests and his role as a priest in encouraging people to protest. His car, loaded with medicine and humanitarian aid, was confiscated. Russian soldiers at the checkpoint told Yurii that his car had been seized by the FSB in Kherson. He was released on the condition that he continue to deliver aid to Kherson and pass on information about Ukrainian roadblocks to the Russian military. Yurii and his wife fled from Kherson the next day.⁸⁹²

A local resident of Snihurivka had scars on his face after spending some time in the torture chamber because the occupiers had poured cologne on his face and set him on fire, with the man's hands tied behind his back. Only his falling from the sofa extinguished the fire. The victim also testified that the occupiers had subjected him to cruel abuse, alleging that he was passing on information to someone else and demanding that he reveal to whom specifically. They shot at the nearby wall, threatened to shoot him in the knees and heels. They covered his head with a wet towel, threw it over his head, and poured water from a bottle, preventing him from breathing. It all lasted for about an hour and a half.⁸⁹³

On September 16, 2022, the occupiers paid a visit to a local resident named Serhii and began to search him, accusing him of passing on data to the Armed Forces. After the search, they put a bag on his head, tied his hands behind his back, and took him to where the Russian soldiers had trenches to torture him. They kicked him so hard that they broke nine of his ribs. They also hit him on the head with assault rifles, threatening to take him out under fire and leave him there «to be killed by his own people.» Then two Russian soldiers came, Serhiy recalls, possibly the FSB, and took him away to another place. They did not beat them there anymore but questioned him about who had connections to the Armed Forces, etc. Then they took him home and checked everything again. They said they would come the next day and continue but never showed up again. Serhii testified that when he got to the hospital after being tortured by the occupiers, he saw another man there who had been subjected to the same torture.⁸⁹⁴

Oleksandr, a resident of Snihurivka, was stopped by the occupiers at a checkpoint and ordered to wait for the elders to arrive. When the minibus pulled up, the Russian military got out, checked the documents, and said they had to search his home. They found expensive electrical appliances in the man's house, which he had brought from work to store at home,

including a special thermal imager (Oleksandr worked as an energy engineer). The occupiers did not accept Oleksandr's explanations that the thermal imager was not military equipment, and they began to «beat out» information from him, alleging that it was transmitting data to the Armed Forces of Ukraine to adjust fire, etc. When they found out that his son lived in the city of Mykolaiv, the invaders came up with the version that he was serving in the Armed Forces there, and Oleksandr was sure to share data with them. The man was apprehended, transported for a long time with a bag on his head and his hands tied, and then brought to the REN [regional electricity networks – ed.] office. There they started showing him other people's photos and asking about them. But Oleksandr could not say anything of what they wanted to hear, so he was transferred «to the basement.» There, he had the bag removed, and two Russian soldiers began brutally torturing him. They beat him, used a shocker, and constantly interrogated him. They also coerced him into working for them, threatened him with «side cutters,» putting them close to his ears and nose as if intending to cut them off. The next day, other Russian soldiers put a bag on his head and supposedly took him to the front lines to be shot. In reality, he was transported to Kherson, thrown into a cell for four men, housing eight captured men. Oleksandr listened to the long and horrible screams of those who had been called out by name. The following day, they put a bag on his head, broke his hands, put him in a car, and took him away. They dumped him on the territory of the Beryslav highway and told him to find his way back himself. Oleksandr was without outerwear with only slippers on, and without documents.⁸⁹⁵

Russian soldiers had lists of local people they planned to abduct. One day they visited the house of a local resident named Denys. «...*They came in armed, wearing masks, and we showed our passports. They said to check the barn and the cellars, looking for Nazis and weapons. We told them that there weren't even any soldiers there, not to mention*

military facilities.» Denys recalled, «...initially, they looked for people who were in the Territorial Defense, ATO, and those in service. The lists expanded over time. There were also lists at checkpoints... cars could be turned around because those on the list were not allowed to leave...» Locals had to endure kidnapping, torture, and abuse. It is still not known exactly how many were killed and missing in Snihurivka. «... Some people were subjected to torture, there are those who spent not one day there but two or three days; they were not often given water and food...» The occupiers abducted not only Ukrainian soldiers but also women and even children. That's how local resident, 15-year-old girl Nastia, and her friend were kidnapped and tortured. According to the girl, «...Women and children were taken away. On the 7th or 8th (2022), my friend and I were kidnapped by the Russians and taken to the basement of a grain elevator. We spent 4 days there without food or water. They wanted to learn about the Armed Forces, about the military... We said we knew nothing, and they said: «You better tell us, or we'll cut off your fingers. Then they left and never came back...» For several days, the children tried to get out of the basement on their own. «...We tried to break down the door for two days, but we couldn't. Then, in the evening, we started to knock on it and kept on knocking until we broke it,» the girl recalls. Nastia said the Russian military had abducted two more girls, but nothing was known about their whereabouts.⁸⁹⁶

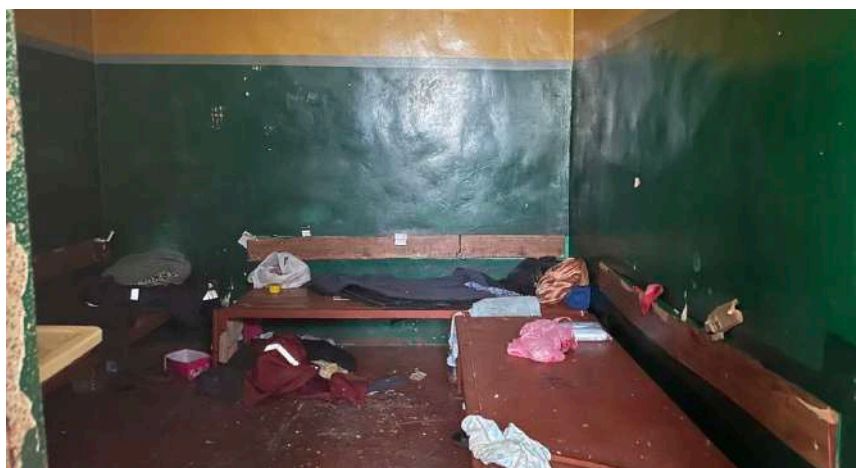
The occupiers detained and tortured a local resident named Andrii Zherdiev twice. «...I was detained twice: once for a day and then for four days. I was kept in solitary confinement. There were five interrogations each day, and psychological and physical pressure was applied...» According to the man, the cells in which the Russians held the kidnapped people were overcrowded. Andrii heard the military interrogating the townspeople. «...I can't talk about the deceased because I can't. But when I was held there for 4 days, all the cells were overcrowded. I have no clue as to how many

people were there... According to rumors, up to 40 people on some days... I heard, and it was impossible not to hear the Russians interrogating other people...» Local residents say they saw Buryats, Kadyrov squad members, soldiers from the «LPR» and «DPR,» and Russian Guard and Tyumen riot police members. Information about the people whom the Russians visited came from the collaborators, many of whom (according to the locals) remained in Snihurivka.⁸⁹⁷

VOZNESENSK DISTRICT

The City of Oleksandrivka

The Security Service of Ukraine has established the location of a torture chamber on the territory of a seized private house in the village of Oleksandrivka. In it, the Russian military forcibly held and brutally tortured local residents who had refused to cooperate with them. They tried to extract information about the addresses of Ukrainian patriots, specifically members of the resistance movement. The victims were suffocated



with plastic bags, beaten with heavy objects, and subjected to electric shocks. During the inspection of the torture chamber, law enforcement officers discovered «tools» of torture used by the occupiers on their captives.⁸⁹⁸

MYKOLAIV DISTRICT

The Village of Kandybyne

The Russian military, threatening with execution, denied local residents even basic medical assistance, upon which people's lives depended. In particular, on March 10, 2022, in the captured village of Kandybyne, occupiers, under the threat of execution, prevented medical personnel from providing medical assistance and transporting a pregnant local resident to the hospital.⁸⁹⁹.

7. *SUMY REGION*

According to the head of the Sumy Regional Military Administration, people tortured by enemies continue to be found on the territory of the Boromlia community. One of the men had a bandaged face, tied hands, and lacerations on his right leg.⁹⁰⁰

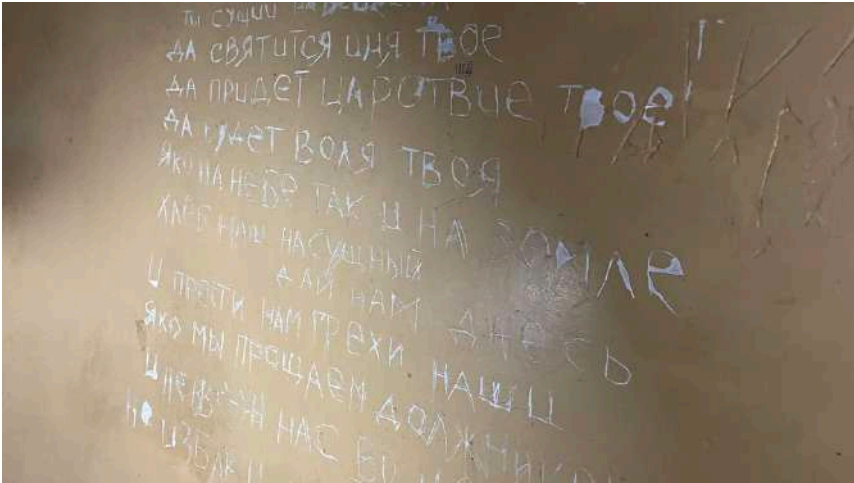
KONOTOP DISTRICT,

The Village of Vyazove

On February 28, 2022, Russian servicemen apprehended two local residents in the village of Vyazove, who delivered bread for local residents. The occupiers put metal handcuffs on them and blindfolded them. They held the men at an agricultural company's premises, systematically beating them and forcing them to provide information about civilian residents of the city of Konotop with a pro-Ukrainian position, the location and whereabouts of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and places where weapons were stored. The detainees were released only on March 2.⁹⁰¹

Law enforcement officers exposed a Russian lieutenant colonel who ordered the torture of civilians in Konotop, Sumy region. Suspicion was announced to him in absentia. According to the investigation, the Russian lieutenant colonel and his subordinates illegally crossed the border in the Sumy region. Already on February 25, 2022, the former issued an order to set up a checkpoint at the entrance to the village of Vyazove. Using force, a local driver was detained there. He was transferred to an agricultural company's premises. The Russian lieutenant colonel ordered his subordinates to strip

the man, tie him up and keep him in a cold room for 4-5 hours with handcuffs on his hands next to black plastic bags, which probably contained bodies. Then the prisoner was released.



The Village of Simyanivka

According to the head of the Sumy Regional Military Administration, at least three bodies of tortured civilian Ukrainians were discovered at the sites of the occupiers' former camps.⁹⁰²

Specifically, after the liberation of the Sumy region, the body of a tortured 41-year-old man was found in a family house on the outskirts of the village in the Konotop district. According to the investigation, the Russian occupiers apprehended a resident of the city of Konotop, tied him up, and tortured him, after which he was shot in the chest. Next to the dead man's body lay his Ukrainian passport.⁹⁰³

OKHTYRKA DISTRICT

The Village of Boromlia

The occupiers brutally tortured and killed Ukrainian marathon record holder Serhii Pronevych. According to his mother, after the full-scale invasion, Serhii joined the Territorial Defense and helped Ukrainian servicemen identify the occupiers' equipment. On March 12, 2022, he was captured by the Russians. According to witness accounts, the man was kept in the basement of a firehouse, where he was brutally tortured. His body was discovered after the liberation of Boromlia, a week after his disappearance. His body bore signs of torture, and traces of handcuffs were found on his hands.⁹⁰⁴

The occupiers seized a local resident named Ihor just on the street near his house. «...*They beat me for about an hour. They broke my jaw. They hit me on the head ten times. My head was all bruised. They tried to cut off my finger but then broke it off...*» According to Igor, there were about a dozen occupiers. They kicked him for no reason and took away valuable things. «...*They are inadequate. They started looking for names in the phone book, asking me about who it was for about an hour. Then they emptied my pockets and then stole the ring from my finger, a chain with a cross, and money. Freaks, that's all...*» The man used to own a grocery store in the village; now he has nothing at all. The Russian military stole about 2.5 thousand US dollars. After being tortured, Ihor was released. He was able to make it to the hospital only three days later, through a «humanitarian corridor.»⁹⁰⁵

The Village of Stanova

The occupiers used the residents of the village of Stanova within the Trostianets community as «human shields» to protect the S-300 surface-to-air missile system they had deployed there. The village was entirely occupied by the Russians. The Russian occupiers positioned tanks along the central street and in every yard adjacent to it. The villagers were deprived of free movement and communication (mobile phones had been taken from them) and isolated by the occupiers.⁹⁰⁶



The City of Trostianets

Violating the requirements of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of the Civilian Persons, the Russian military abducted and abused civilians during the occupation of the city of Trostianets.

32-year-old Oleksandr was taken away from his own house at gunpoint. He was held in a basement for more than a day and beaten. His personal belongings and mobile phone were taken from him. 43-year-old Eduard was apprehended by the military on the street. He spent nearly a week in the basement of the railway station in Trostianets. In captivity, he was beaten, his leg was cut with a knife, and they threatened him with death. Both men were later released. At the same time, on March 21, 2022, the corpse with traces of torture of 45-year-old

man named Mykola was found in a silo pit near the village of Bilka of the Trostianets territorial community. He had been detained by persons who had identified themselves as Russian military personnel on March 3, 2022.⁹⁰⁷

Viktoriia Ivanova, a resident of Trostianets, worked in a local flower shop. After the full-scale invasion and the occupation of the city by Russians, she became a fire adjuster for the Ukrainian military. Every day Victoria went out into the city and watched the movement of Russian military equipment. All these data were transmitted to the AFU. During one of these trips to the city, the Russians apprehended her and found a photo of Russian equipment in her phone. The invaders tortured Viktoriia and then killed her.⁹⁰⁸

On March 30, 2022, after the liberation of the city, two bound bodies with gunshot wounds were discovered. The deceased were civilians whose relatives had reported their disappearance a few days before.⁹⁰⁹

Overall, after the liberation of Trostianets and the surrounding territories, the State Bureau of Investigation of Ukraine documented about 20 instances of torture of the local population of Trostianets. «...*The investigation has identified the places where the occupiers tortured civilians. Currently, at least 20 such instances have been recorded. Batons, handcuffs, metal pincers, and the victims' clothes with traces of blood were discovered at the crime scene...*»⁹¹⁰

8. KHARKIV REGION

The Main Department of the National Police in the Kharkiv region reported that there were torture chambers in every occupied city and village in the Kharkiv region (for reference: as of January 2023, law enforcement officers had discovered 25 torture chambers). They contained from ten to hundreds of people. «...There are people who were tortured there, but it is not known exactly where they were held because they typically transported our citizens blindfolded, never took them outside, and took them back also blindfolded. We establish the locations based on how long it took to drive there, descriptions of the premises, etc...»

Regarding the types of torture applied to Ukrainians: «The most common torture included severe beatings and electric shocks. Gas masks were actively used, and people were strangled. In addition, there were instances of pulling out nails and sawing teeth off with a file. Examinations of the bodies recovered from the liberated territories showed that torture had occurred related to, let's put it this way, harming the genitals. Typically, of men.»

Torture using hammers and nooses has also been documented.⁹¹¹

The conditions of detention of people in torture chambers were analogous to the conditions of detention of prisoners in Nazi concentration camps during World War II. For instance, the prisoners were fed all kinds of junk, and they were taken to the toilet once a day,



or even less often. Both men and women were subjected to torture. Facts exist that even children were held there.

There were local residents who collaborated with the occupiers and pointed their finger at those with whom they did not get along well, accusing them of cooperation with the AFU, of not accepting the rules of the «new» life dictated by the «liberators.» The people they pointed to were seized and dragged to the torture chamber.⁹¹²



Police investigators have evidence that whole families, including minor children, were held in torture chambers. There were also many women and even children (teenagers aged 14-16) in the dungeons. Both physical and moral pressure was applied to teenagers. The girls were threatened with rape.

«We have the testimony of a minor who was taken from her home together with her parents. She said they constantly came to her saying: «You're gonna have fun.» The child was in a cell knowing they could do anything to her at any moment,» said Volodymyr Tymoshko, head of the National Police Department in the Kharkiv region.⁹¹³

«...They found bodies of people with 'controlling' shots in the head and with their hands tied behind their backs. As for the scale, we'll be able to understand it after liberating our territories,» commented the Head of the Kharkiv Regional Military Administration. Also, according to him, the Russians made a «prison, or better yet – a concentration camp» on the territory of one of the industrial enterprises in Kupyansk, where they

put detained people to carry out «certain measures to achieve their objectives.»⁹¹⁴

After the liberation of the Kharkiv region, a mass grave of more than 440 bodies of Ukrainian citizens was discovered in one of the cities. It contained many Ukrainian servicemen. However, both military and civilians were brutally killed by the invaders. Many bodies exhibited signs of brutal torture.⁹¹⁵

The Security Service of Ukraine intercepted a conversation between a Russian occupier in the Kharkiv region and his father, which served as new evidence of Russian atrocities in our country:

«... *How have you been?*» asked the father.

- *We're now in the Kharkiv region, clearing out a village.*

- *Got the «Grads?»*

- *Well, we got them behind the village pouring fire from there. «Grads,» mortars, Buks... Well, today we (expletive) surpassed ourselves. We surrounded a village from three sides (expletive) and (expletive). We just leveled (expletive) the houses; we shot everywhere: at buildings and cars. Our tanks and armored vehicles leveled (expletive) all the houses. We took two prisoners and cut off an ear from one of them.*

- *Why?* - the occupier's father asked indifferently.

- *He didn't want to talk so we cut off his ear. Ha, ha, ha. (the executioner burst into laughter.)*

- *It's tough out there.*

- *That's soft. He should be thankful for not getting a bullet in his forehead. Or for not being quartered with tanks. We could have just put him there and used an entire machine gun box of 100 bullets on him, making a colander out of him. Or we could have cut off a finger or two.*

- *Are you allowed to do that?*

- *We must do that!!!»*

Then Russian enthusiastically tells his father about how his fellow servicemen rob the local population and take food from locals:

«...Do they provide you with rations, son?

- As we left from bogs in Russia, they gave us something. That's it. The boys here went on a scouting mission and brought sausages, mayonnaise, and lard.

- Did you go to the store?

- No, we went around households. It don't matter what they think (expletive). We got guns and a tank. If someone refuses (expletive), then it's 'one home less' and they would live on the street.»

Another conversation intercepted by the SBU between a Russian occupier in eastern Ukraine and his relatives in Russia shows that the Russians do not hesitate to shoot civilians who try to flee from the occupied territories:

«...They've got no choice now. They try to pass through at night. We do them in. I don't feel sorry for them, even civilians. Those wanted have already left. So we keep shootin' 'em. I don't give a damn».⁹¹⁶

Law enforcement officers have identified Russian soldiers who raped a young girl in the Kharkiv region in the spring of 2022. Those are a 43-year-old colonel, commander of the 99th Self-Propelled Artillery Regiment of the 3rd Motor Rifle Division of the 20th Combined Arms Army of the Armed Forces of Russia, and two of his subordinates, a 20-year-old private (the driver), and a 24-year-old junior sergeant (the command combat vehicle commander). According to the investigation, the invaders came to the house where the girl lived with her family. At first they threatened them with weapons and then started shooting from assault rifles in the direction of utility premises. After that, the suspects ordered to give them all

means of communication for checking. Having made sure they were dealing with civilians, the Russian military left the house but returned in the evening of the same day, ordered the girl's relatives to stay at home, and the victim was forcibly placed in an armored personnel carrier and taken to one of the houses, where the commander was waiting for them. They covered the girl's



eyes with a hood so that she would not understand where she was being taken and would not remember the route. On the way, the Russian military began to strip the girl. When they arrived at the house where the commander was, the occupants took turns raping the girl. The commander had told his subordinates that he would do it first.⁹¹⁷

IZIUM DISTRICT

The City of Balakliia

A torture chamber was discovered in the local police station in the liberated city of Balakliia in the Kharkiv region after the occupiers' withdrawal. The invaders kept local residents captured from the streets for months. The Russian occupiers tortured women for weeks, e.g, for a Ukrainian flag in their possession or because their relatives were serving in the Armed Forces. There is information that several people were beaten to death.

In the same torture chamber, the occupiers brutally abused a male and a female employee of the Balakliia fire station.

When they were apprehended, a bag was put on their heads. they were wrapped with tape, their hands handcuffed behind their back, and taken in an unknown direction. In the torture chamber, the bag was removed from the woman's head, and she was placed in a small room with three to six people (the number of prisoners constantly changed). They slept for several hours a day whenever possible because the torture chamber was located directly above this room.



The victim heard her colleague being interrogated, the gang rapes taking place, people being beaten to death during interrogations and then dragged downstairs. «...These were gang rapes involving more than 20 people each... the occupiers came down and called each other into the room one by one, where each of them raped a woman...» During the interrogations, the prisoners had guns shoved into their mouths and were stripped. The victim said that there were women in the cell with her who were electrocuted by the occupiers during interrogations. There were video surveillance cameras in their cell so that the Russian military could watch them around the clock. There was no electricity in the cell, yet almost every evening, when it was already dark, a masked occupier would come and shine a flashlight into their eyes, asking various questions and trying to get the women to cooperate.⁹¹⁸

Artem, a resident of Balakliia, was held by the occupiers in a cell in the district police department for 46 days. He survived beatings and electric shock. His «crime» is a photo of him with his military brother. Because of it, he was subjected

to beatings and asked about his connections with the Armed Forces and local anti-terrorist formations. «...Someone was asked about politics, another one about something else. I was asked more about my brother. Although they had allegedly apprehended him because of his brother, they asked him about who remained in the city, who served, and about former soldiers. But how would I know?» «You're lying!» «They started spinning the thing, and as the magneto dropped, the voltage jumped,» recounted Artem. The Russians set up cameras in any room in the department. All premises were cramped so much that there was not even a centimeter between the mattresses. There were no toilets for men; people had to use a 5-liter bottle instead. They could do the rest in the yard, where they were taken twice a day with bags on their heads. There was a toilet in the women's cell, but they would throw in a pack of protective masks instead of toilet paper. According to Artem, it consisted of unsalted porridge provided twice a day.»...Sometimes we had soup for lunch. That is, it was what the soldiers hadn't finished. It was like a holiday. But it rarely happened that they gave us the remainder of the soup (a plate or two) per cell. It went around and each had three spoons. That was it.»⁹¹⁹

The occupiers abused a resident of Balakliia, Svitlana Shcherbak, and her minor daughter and husband. In June 2022, five armed invaders came to the house where she and her husband and daughter were hiding. Two more soldiers were waiting outside. She and her 16-year-old daughter were taken out into the street. The occupiers checked their phones and found pro-Ukrainian publications. The family was taken to one of the torture chambers in the city. They had bags on their heads all the time. She and her daughter were placed in a metal cage in the basement, where there were already three women. Then they were transferred to a tiny room in the basement. There was a stench in the room for 5 women, which had two narrow wooden benches, on which they slept two at a time. The toilet was also in this small room. They were

fed once a day. They would give two liters of water to the five of them for drinking and for the toilet. Svitlana's husband was kept in another basement, with water on the floor and running down the walls. There were other men there and the room was very small. They took turns sleeping seated up. Svitlana was interrogated, and the occupiers threatened to rape her daughter in front of her to coerce her into cooperating. They also threatened to beat her and her daughter. When Svitlana passed out, they could not bring her back to consciousness and sent her to the hospital. After a while, her daughter was also brought there. The man was released only two weeks later.⁹²⁰

On April 29, 2022, the occupiers tortured to death a local businessman and public activist Maksym Shelekhan in Balakliia. During the occupation, Maksym began to help the AFU (adjusting fire and scouting information). The Russian military captured him on the tip-off from local collaborators and tortured him to death.⁹²¹



Under the procedural guidance of the Kharkiv Regional Prosecutor's Office, a suspicion has been communicated in absentia to the senior operative officer of the FSB of Russia for the Baltic Fleet and the troops of the Kaliningrad region for violations of the laws and customs of war. According to the investigation, while on the territory of Balakliia city, which was occupied by Russian military forces at the time, the suspect organized illegal detentions and the captivity of civilians in a torture chamber located in a building captured from the police department. An FSB employee personally interrogated the detainees, attempting to obtain information from the victims

regarding the coordinates of Ukrainian military positions and information about pro-Ukrainian citizens. Pursuant to the suspect's orders, the occupiers stopped one of the local residents at a checkpoint when he was driving his car. Threatening him with weapons, the Russian military personnel brought him to the torture chamber. There, the FSB agent awaited him and proceeded to interrogate the man. The occupiers hit the victim all over his body. Russian servicemen beat another victim with a rubber stick and used a stun gun as ordered by the FSB officer. Both detainees were denied access to toilets. Water and food were provided infrequently and in small quantities over long periods of time. In such conditions, civilians were kept from 10 to 20 days, after which the Russian occupiers released them.⁹²²

The Settlement of Borova

Illia, a former soldier and a resident of the village of Pisky-Radkivski, was tortured by the occupiers in their torture chamber in the village of Borova. The man is convinced that the locals handed him over to the Russians: «...*They clearly came to particular houses and knew where to look. My documents were hidden in different places, but they found all of them. Ukrainian flags, including those of the 92nd brigade, where I had served, were also found...*» The man almost lost his sight after the injury sustained at the frontlines. Despite explaining to the Russians that he was taking care of his mother, who could hardly move on her own, the Russian military severely beat Illia, tied him up, and took him away. «... *Well, they beat even harder in Borova. I don't even want to talk about it. My hands were tied and I had a bag over my head...*» After the beatings and interrogations



in the evening of the same day, Illia and several other fellow villagers were released to go home. However, neither documents nor personal belongings were ever returned to them.⁹²³

In the same village, the Russians abducted from his home and tortured a local resident who was a former member of the Anti-Terrorist Operation, named Serhii Avdieiev. He was 33 years old. The man had returned from the front line several years before and had not been involved in military affairs. «... After the onset of the war, the Russians immediately came to talk to him. He was not living with us but with his wife and children. The second time, the «LPR» representatives came and took him away. And that was it... he never came back,» said Serhii's mother. The former soldier was probably detained and tortured in the village of Novoplatonivka near Borova on the territory of the «Miner's Light» recreation center. At least his relatives found his body there during the occupation. The occupiers left no part of Serhii's body unharmed. «All of his fingers were broken, all of them. The expert told us about it here, at the cemetery. He was badly cut and bruised. There were many bullets in his body. It's scary. Four children were left without a father,» said the mother of the murdered man. Svitlana Avdieieva assumes that her son was betrayed by someone locally because they came to look for the former soldier precisely at his place of residence, and not at his registration address.⁹²⁴

The Village of Vesele

The village of Vesele near Iziium, Kharkiv region, was occupied by Russian troops from the end of February to May 3, 2022. After securing their positions, the Russians began to check, interrogate,



and torture the local population. The occupiers came to 61-year-old Mykola, a local electrician, veteran football player, and coach. The occupiers had a dossier on him, containing all kinds of information about his circle of communication, the people he helped, and even the information that in 2015, as a deputy of the local council, he had distributed land to the ATO participants. The occupiers' torture chamber was located in the same village on the territory of the construction brigade. The Russians tortured the man for more than five hours, putting him on his knees, kicking him in the chest, drowning him in a bucket of water, and using electric shocks. They were interested in the information he had been exchanging and with whom. Mykola later testified that not all Ukrainians could endure the torture the occupiers used on Ukrainians. There were buckets of water in the room, which were then tied to the prisoners' feet and twisted until they bled. They struck their legs with a wooden bar with all their might until the muscles were torn from the bones. The wire was wound to the toes (all of this was done on a wet floor; the prisoners' heads were wet, and so were their clothes) and the electric current was applied while periodically putting a prisoner's head into a bucket of water.



After such torture, he was transported to the basement of one of the cafes located along the Rostov highway. It had wooden flooring. After a few hours, he was given food and several bottles of water. Mykola spent several days in the basement, after which he was helped out of the basement (he could no longer move on his own) and taken home.⁹²⁵



The Village of Husarivka

The body of a 27-year-old medic with traces of torture was found in the village of Husarivka, Kharkiv region. Serhii Bolvinov, head of the investigative department of the State Police in the Kharkiv region, said they discovered multiple scars on the victim's body. The man had a cranial injury, he was shot in the knees, feet, and chest, which caused his death. The medical worker is known to have participated in the Anti-Terrorist Operation in the east of the country.⁹²⁶

Three mutilated bodies of tortured people, including a child, were discovered in the basement of a private home. «... *According to the investigation, signs of long-term abuse and torture were found during the examination of the bodies. People had been burned alive. There was one child among the tortured. It was established that the commandant's office of the Russian military had been located in the yard for a long time,*» the National Police of Ukraine said in [a statement](#).⁹²⁷

The City of Izium

The occupiers set up a torture chamber in Izium, where patriotic Ukrainians were kept in a small basement. The occupiers had laid linoleum on the basement floor to quickly wash away the blood. The prisoners were tortured in an attempt to coerce them into collaboration or take responsibility for spying in favor of the Armed Forces while a special representative recorded the testimony.⁹²⁸

The occupiers set up one of the torture chambers in the city police premises. Local residents were held there in inhumane conditions. They were not even allowed to go to the toilet. People were restrained, had their air supply blocked, had gas masks placed on them, and were beaten with batons. When the Ukrainian law enforcement agencies entered the premises of this torture chamber after the liberation, they discovered

many devices and means used to torture people, including wooden racks on which the prisoners were supposed to sleep were covered with blood and urine. There were signs of abuse everywhere. The bodies of people from this torture chamber were subsequently found at the mass burial sites. They had their hands tied behind their backs, and their genitals and limbs had been cut off. The bodies exhibited other signs of brutal torture.⁹²⁹

A man's body was exhumed from the mass grave, showing signs of brutal torture. In particular, his hands were tied behind his back and his scrotum was cut off.⁹³⁰

The occupiers abducted Maksym from his own home and held at the police station. He shared the cell with former servicemen who had served in 2014-2015. He himself had not served. Maksym was taken to interrogations daily in an attempt to «beat out» a testimony out of him. *«...I was grabbed, a cap was pulled over my eyes, and I was eventually taken to the torture chamber. They handcuffed me and applied the electric current. No one explained anything. During the first two days, no questions were asked, it was just torture. I tried to ask them: «Why are you doing this? What do you want?» «You know it yourself. Talk!...» the man recalls. After several days of torture, the occupiers stated their first demand, which was to confess to his cooperation with the SBU.*⁹³¹

The Russian military came to the home of a 34-year-old volunteer named Viktor on the morning of May 9, 2022. The occupiers in balaclavas and military uniforms tied up the man, blindfolded him, and took him for interrogation. For three days, Viktor was abused, pressured, and broken psychologically. The occupiers wanted him to know about the positions of the Armed Forces. *«...On day one, they gave neither food nor drink. They never removed the blindfold. I could hear that other people were held there as well...» «...Interrogations were conducted by one person. Sometimes two. They removed the blindfold for this. They would pressure you: «Maybe you*

do know something. Can you tell us about someone?» They abused you depending on what you said. I had two seconds to answer quickly. If I failed, I was immediately hit to make me think faster. For some reason, I was called «right sector.» When I started talking about the position of the military, they accused me of treason against Ukrainians. I'd already tried to leave the city, and the Russians knew about it. They asked why I had been trying to leave. They said: «You do realize you will fight against us, don't you? You'll immediately be sent to the front line because they think you're a traitor.» The condition for my release was providing truthful information. I told them. They left, checked it, and said I was «clean.» The next day, on May 12, they released me...»⁹³²

The invaders accused a local resident of informing the Ukrainian army about Russian positions because the school housing the headquarters of the Russian army had come under fire not far from his house. He spent twelve days in the torture chamber. «...I came straight to hell, where I was tortured with electric current for hours. They attached the clamps to my fingers and ankles and applied the current. My body shook from head to toe, and I couldn't breathe. Every time I thought my heart would not take the strain. Then they stopped for several hours, threw me in the cell, and grabbed someone else. Then they came back for me again... For the last few days, they stuck long needles in my back. I don't remember what happened after that.»⁹³³

The occupiers brutally tortured an acquaintance of a local resident named Valentyna. He was grabbed from the street and thrown into the basement, where the occupiers' torture chamber was located. The prisoners were deprived of food or water. The



Russian military threw explosive devices into the prisoners' cells, lifted people up, and then threw them from the height to the ground, and put weapons to their heads, threatening to kill them. Her friend started stuttering after such torture. People were tortured simply for being Ukrainian.⁹³⁴

The Russian military came to a fireman because he was on their lists. *«He was tortured and then released. There is no information about what is with him now.»*⁹³⁵

Law enforcement bodies have identified a Russian serviceman involved in a cynical war crime. It is a 26-year-old native of Dagestan, the combat vehicle commander of the jet division of military unit 61899 of the 27th Separate Guards Motor Rifle Brigade of the 1st Tank Army of the Western Military District of the Russian Armed Forces. According to the investigation, on May 7, 2022, a Russian military man visited the pathology department of the Central City Hospital of the Pishchanka Virgin Mary in Iziur. The employees at their workplace, including a 70-year-old forensic medical expert who was using a prosthesis because of losing his leg after a serious illness. The occupier introduced himself, called himself «Kadyrov's nephew,» and started talking to the employees. The medical examiner, who considered the stay of the Russian military in the city of Iziur illegal, said: *«Who asked you to come here?»* The Russian serviceman began to behave aggressively. He punched the expert several times in the face and fired four shots from a Kalashnikov assault rifle into the ceiling. Frightened, a female laboratory assistant ran outside. The occupier ordered the pathologist to return her immediately, and the man followed her. When the Russian serviceman and the forensic expert remained in the office alone, the occupier shot the man.⁹³⁶

The Village of Kunye

In the spring of 2022, the Russian military took Valerii to the basement and subjected him to torture: *«...they undressed*

and beat me, saying we'd been informing on them. They drowned and burned me...» The man has many scars on his hands. When asked by journalists what the occupiers had used to burn him, Valerii said he did not know. *«...I had a bag over my head. They put a bag on my head and then a pillowcase on top of the bag. They poured water and I stopped breathing. Then they stopped pouring water, but it stuck and I still couldn't breathe. I lay like that in the basement for a day and a half. I was already dreaming of getting some glass container to break it and cut the veins. I simply could not take it any more...»* They decided to let the man go after the torture, but they also used mockery: *« ...They dressed me in a suit, a pink shirt, a pack of 'Parliament' cigarettes, and let me walk like that around the village for everyone to see they had let me go. They mocked me like that...»* According to Valerii, many local residents passed through that basement-based torture house. Everyone was typically accused of collaborating with the Armed Forces and passing data, although all the phones that could have been used to do that had been confiscated.⁹³⁷

The Village of Novoplatonivka

The bodies of two men aged 30-35 tortured by the occupiers were found at a recreation center in the village of Novoplatonivka within the Boriv territorial community. According to law enforcement officers, the men were dressed in civilian clothes, their hands were handcuffed. Investigators recorded gunshot wounds to the head and traces of torture.⁹³⁸

The Village of Pisky-Radkivski

According to the Central Police Department in the Kharkiv region, the Russians tortured local residents, including participants of the Anti-Terrorist Operation and the Ukrainian military, in the torture chamber located in the basement of

a village house. «As of now, the police are definitely aware of the torture of burying/digging into the ground alive and using a gas mask with a smoldering rag. A dildo, a box with torn dentures, wires with ropes, and a letter containing the interview of one of the men held there were also discovered in the torture chambers. The occupiers seized one of the private houses with a basement of 1.5 by 2 meters. The Russians held civilians and prisoners of war there. It is the 22nd torture chamber found in the region's liberated area. The most popular tortures included electric shocks, gas masks, beatings, and pulling out nails. There was also a man with a broken arm, who was subjected to inserting bicycle spokes under the skin on his back. As of October 6, 2022, the bodies of 534 civilians had been found. Most of the corpses found had their hands tied and had bullet wounds to the head and cuts around the groin.»⁹³⁹

During the occupation of the village by the Russian military, human screams and moans could occasionally be heard from one of the houses in the center of the village. The Russian military brought all detained local residents there. These were mostly local businessmen and farmers, whom the occupiers tried to coerce into collaborating with them through torture. Information was also received regarding the disappearance of former ATO participants who remained in the occupied territory.⁹⁴⁰



The Village of Savyntsi

At the beginning of the full-scale invasion, 70-year-old Anatolii Harahatyi filmed from his balcony a convoy of Russian vehicles entering the village of Savyntsi, Kharkiv region. For that, the Russians took the man to the detention center, where Anatolii spent 100 days. The Russians considered him «the greatest Bandera follower in the Balakliia community.» The Russian occupiers tortured the man with electric shocks for filming the video and wanted to force him to shoot propaganda videos. «...*The humidity in our cell was around 80%, and the temperature was 35 degrees. I don't know how we survived there...*» ...»*Interrogations with electric shocks; they applied electricity on us. Everything was used. They wanted me to work for them, shooting videos in Balakliia and publish them on my YouTube channel to praise Putin and the Russian army. I flatly refused, and I spent a lot of time in captivity for that...*» Anatolii was interrogated eight times. «...*If you went to an interrogation and spoke Ukrainian, you were hit with a stun gun or a stick for each word. That's how I learned Russian there. During the interrogations, only Russian was used. You wouldn't survive the interrogation otherwise...*» In captivity, Ukrainians were given porridge and bread once a week). The man was released from captivity in September, four days before the liberation of Balakliia.⁹⁴¹

The Village of Synycheno

On October 10, 2022, law enforcement officers of the Kharkiv region found the body of a man with obvious signs of torture in a forest strip in the village of Synycheno, Izium district. His head was wrapped tightly in a bandage, and his hands were tied with a cord. According to preliminary investigations, the man was killed and tortured by Russian soldiers during the occupation of the settlement. They left the body of the murdered man in the strip.⁹⁴²

KUPYANSK DISTRICT,

The Village of Bezmiatezhne

Ukrainian law enforcement officers established that on July 31, 2022, a soldier of the 7th separate motor rifle regiment (a native of the Kursk region of Russia) and another Russian military personnel came to a farm in the village of Bezmiatezhne, Kupyansk district, owned by a man with an active pro-Ukrainian position (originally from Zakarpattia region). The occupant got out of the car and told the farmer to approach him under the pretext of helping him repair the car. When he approached, the occupant shot him in the head. The man fell to the ground and died on the spot. After that, the Russian soldier dismembered the murdered man's body, put some parts in their car and set it on fire. In order to hide this cynical crime, the soldier took the chopped remains of the farmer's body with him to throw them away on the way to the village of Vyshneve, Kupyansk district.⁹⁴³

The Settlement of Velykyi Burluk

Viktor Tereshchenko, the head of the Velykyi Burluk community, was apprehended by the Russian occupiers in March 2022 at his workplace. In mid-March, servicemen from the so-called «LPR» and «DPR» entered the village. After Viktor's refusal to collaborate (the occupiers had demanded information about local activists, ATO participants, military personnel, etc.), they said to him: «*They Russians will come,*



inject you with something, and you will tell all you know and don't know.» A few days later, the community head was abducted from his workplace and put in a cell at the local police station, where the occupiers had set up a torture chamber. They held Viktor there for two days, interrogated him about local activists, ATO participants, etc. They also suggested that he cooperate with the occupation authorities, threatening him that he would not be able to leave the territory. As a result, Victor's health deteriorated significantly and the occupiers had to call an ambulance. He was taken to the hospital in a grave condition and stayed there for about two weeks. Later, Victor returned to the community but did not go back to his office being forced to leave for the Ukrainian-controlled territory.⁹⁴⁴

The City of Kupyansk

A resident of Kupyansk was tortured by FSB representatives who used electric shocks on him and beat him with pipes and bats. During the first interrogation, he was tortured and shot at for 40 minutes. The victim had a bag on his head all the time. He was held in inhumane conditions, without food, water, toilets, without proper medical care, etc. It has been established that some crosses were burned on Ukrainian citizens' bodies with a soldering iron. FSB employees beat the local residents to obtain the names and addresses of ATO participants, Territorial Defense members, and people holding a pro-Ukrainian position. The detained Ukrainians were threatened with death on a minefield and massacre of their families in the occupied city.⁹⁴⁵



A local resident of Kupyansk was repeatedly detained by the occupiers and placed in the local torture chamber, located in the police station. The grounds for detention could be anything, including a ten-minute-long curfew violation while returning from work. During his time in the torture chamber, the victim said he was subjected to beatings and interrogations. The occupiers tried to coerce him into cooperating to inform about pro-Ukrainian citizens and point fingers at people and weapons storage, etc. This victim also testified that the occupiers had tortured many local residents. The cells contained a great many detained Ukrainians. In particular, there were 25 people in a four-person cell where he was held at one time (some of the captives had been there for about a month). Several men were handcuffed to the horizontal bar in the cell for several days; they could not even walk. Every evening, the occupiers put everyone else to face the cell's wall while they beat those handcuffed. The latter were mocked for holding a pro-Ukrainian position. In particular, one man had hung out a Ukrainian flag, another one had shouted «Glory to Ukraine» at an occupiers' checkpoint, still another was a former ATO officer, etc. The occupiers kept them strapped for five days. Their feet swelled so much that when they remained unfastened for several hours, they would fall and could not even walk. These men were not allowed to eat, food was shared with them by the other men in this cell; they were fed from a spoon.⁹⁴⁶

Maksym Zhorin from the Azov battalion published a fragment of a video from a location where Russian occupiers shot civilians in Kupyansk. The short video shows the Russian occupiers leading a man in civilian clothes to be executed. There are two occupants. One of them has the tactical sign of Russian units on its legs, namely wound red tape. «...*Look closely at the executioners. It is clear to everyone that the Russian military war carrying out this execution of ordinary civilians in the occupied city. The investigators already have the full video. The Russian soldiers will be identified.*» The new video chronologically preceded the previously released

video, in which the body of a murdered person is dumped by the occupiers into a pit with the bodies of others who were shot dead. Both videos were found in the phone of a Russian invader.⁹⁴⁷

The Settlement of Kupyansk-Vuzlovyi

On October 6, 2022, the prosecutor's investigative team conducted an examination of the incident scene, where they discovered the lifeless bodies of two individuals, both estimated to be around 60 years of age. The victims were found with their hands bound in close proximity to a metal cylinder drum within a brick-making workshop. Both deceased individuals bore signs of having endured torture.⁹⁴⁸

After the liberation of the territories in the Kharkiv Region, specifically in Kupyansk-Vuzlovyi, a law enforcement officer discovered a grave within a forested area where four individuals were buried. Among them were an elderly woman, 73 years of age, and another woman, aged 71, along with her grandson and daughter-in-law. The occupiers had confined these innocent civilians in a cellar before shooting them on the same site. The bodies of the victims bore the evidence of this brutal act, exhibiting numerous bullet wounds throughout their bodies, including their heads. This incident clearly constitutes a case of deliberate execution of these individuals.⁹⁴⁹

KHARKIV DISTRICT

The Settlement of Kozacha Lopan

The National Police of Ukraine and the Security Service of Ukraine found a torture chamber in the urban-type settlement of Kozacha Lopan, Kharkiv region. According to law

enforcement officers, civilians were tortured in the premises of the so-called «people's militia.» During the inspection, documents were found confirming the operation of the pseudo-police department and the apparatus the Russian military used to torture civilians with electric current.⁹⁵⁰

The occupiers brutally tortured a former ATO participant from Kozacha Lopan. The occupiers found and apprehended him on March 22, 2022. He went through two torture chambers in the two basements in Kozacha Lopan (under the bus station and in the vegetable storage facilities). The occupiers kicked him all at once until he passed out. «...*They tortured me with electric current for an hour, including by connecting it to the genitals. I had burns on my leg when it caught fire because of the wires. They poured water over it to increase the conductivity. They took me to Hoptivka and then threw me out. My ribs were broken, but I walked home toward the village while dragging another local whose legs were broken; he couldn't walk...*»⁹⁵¹

The occupiers also tortured a local resident named Oleh Dyhalo. On March 17, 2022, over fifteen Russian soldiers broke into his apartment. The entire family (himself, his wife, 29-year-old son who is disabled from childhood [his blood does not clot properly], his minor daughter, his nephew and other relatives) were ordered to lie on the ground. The occupiers blindfolded them with tape, tied up their hands, took them out and pushed them into a car that took them to the basement of the local bus station. When in the basement, Oleh begged the occupiers not to beat his son because of his bleeding disorder since he would die from blood loss. But the more Oleh begged, the more the occupiers beat his son. Then Oleh's nephew, Artem, also started asking not to beat Oleh's son. However, the occupiers started beating Artem as well. Oleh's son and nephew stayed in the basement of the station for three days before being released. Oleh was held in the basement for eight days before being transported to the

village of Hoptivka, where he was kept for another two days. As soon as Oleh was brought to the basement in the station, the occupiers immediately hung him up by the hands, and hit him in the chest and legs with a stick or baton. They pierced his legs with something saying they wanted to make the «meat come off the bone» to cause Oleh to become disabled. Oleh also testified the presence of many detainees. «...*People were thrown at each other in the room...*» On the eighth day in the basement, one of the occupiers told them to «be brave» because those whom the occupiers themselves feared had arrived. After those words, Oleh was taken away by two men (Russian military) and, as he later found out, they brought him to the second floor of the station. They were beaten severely for a long time and then put on the floor with their stomachs down, ordered to keep their heads up. Metal clips were attached to their ears, and some object was placed on their backs. Then the occupiers started twisting something, and Oleh was electrocuted. This lasted for about 30 minutes. Oleh also testified that the occupiers, when hanging him up by the hands, had threatened that they would bring his 17-year-old daughter there, untie his eyes, and «with a bunch of soldiers» would rape her right there, and he would watch it.⁹⁵²

A local resident of Kozacha Lopan and a former soldier named Andrii, tried everything to escape from the occupiers who were looking for him. He had been hiding since the beginning of the occupation. According to the testimony of his fellow villagers and his wife, on May 5, 2022, he was seen at the local train station. In May, he was seen in the village of Hoptivka. An acquaintance said: «...*Your husband says a big hello.*» However, the occupiers came searching his house and apprehended his eldest son. They used him to blackmail the family to make the head of the family, Andrii, come to the «commandant's office.» As it turned out the man was already in the basement. Unrecognizable from the beatings and practically unconscious. He was seen there by a neighbor and his son, who were released after several days of questioning.

Besides Andrii, at least two more soldiers went missing in the village.⁹⁵³

Another former soldier who had served in the Anti-Terrorist Operation and a resident of Kozachoa Lopan went through the entire «network» of the occupiers' torture camps. A whole structure of «investigators» operated in the village in addition to several places of illegal detention. At first, people were thrown into the basement of the vegetable store (a metal cage had been made for them there). In front of it stood a school chair, on which they were interrogated with electric current. Several dozen people were stuffed into a cage without a toilet, having to «under themselves.» No food or medical assistance was provided - all this is under constant surveillance. Near them was the «recreation area» of the so-called supervisors, with empty bottles, leftover food, «nebulizer,» and cards scattered on the table. The man remembers this basement because of the pain and pieces of foam on which he lost consciousness. *«...All ATO participants were broken instantly. They brought them and immediately broke them. When they brought me here and started beating me, they would shout: «Hello, ATO participant from Donbas!» I was subjected to electric shocks for about an hour. It was at the station. I found that room...»* the man said. The second place of torture was located at the railway station building. They carried out interrogations in the basement and in the offices. A man said he even had to wait in line because too many people were dragged there by the Russians, regardless of age or gender. The man was beaten before the Russian mass media arrived to force him to speak the published text on camera. *«...They grabbed all of us, ATO participants on the same day and brought us there. All the offices were occupied. We sat cramped in the basement. There were a lot of people in front of us and behind us. I heard wheezing and coughing. Someone yelled. A lot of people, not necessarily ATO participants. My hands were tied behind my back, and there was a hood put over my head. He came up and began to take off my pants, and underpants, I mean*

completely. I felt something like a clothespin being pinned on my genitals. On the fifth day, I was taken out of the basement. A TV crew filmed me...» the man recalled. Hoptivka was the third place of torture for the man. The Russians called it «zero» since it was on the border with Russia. FSB agents worked on the most «promising» prisoners there. Military personnel and businessmen were taken there to «knock out» information or money. The man spent a month in the cellars. He was released from the so-called «zero» with broken ribs. After the liberation of the Kharkiv region, Ukrainian law enforcement officers conducted investigative actions in the premises of the Kozacha Lopan torture camps. They took fingerprints and retrieved special torture devices, including an old telephone used to «wind up» the current and anything else. In one of the basements, they even found a hole punch - the occupiers used it to break the prisoners' fingers.⁹⁵⁴

The Village of Lyptsi

Local residents were brutally tortured in the torture chamber set up in the village (premises of the so-called «People's Militia of the LPR»). There, the militants of the so-called «LPR» and the Russian military illegally imprisoned local residents supporting the territorial integrity of Ukraine and refusing to cooperate with the occupiers. According to the SBU, the Russians subjected the prisoners to brutal torture, including through the use of electric chair made by the occupiers, after which they were forcibly taken to the territory of Russia.⁹⁵⁵

The occupiers detained a former Ukrainian serviceman and ATO in the village of Lyptsi, Kharkiv region. The occupiers beat the man daily with batons on his heels and rifle butts on his body, breaking his ribs.



Later, the victim was handed over to Russian FSB officers, who were interested in obtaining information about other servicemen, local policemen, and patriotic citizens. «...*At first, they beat me with a stun gun, and then they began to use the 'tapik' [a field military telephone device with an induction coil that Russians use for electrocution]. I had no more strength to resist, I was afraid. Every second reminded me of broken ribs, festering wounds on my burned legs, which there was nothing to treat with...*»⁹⁵⁶

The Village of Tsyrkuny

The occupiers came to the house of local residents, jumped over the fence, and started shouting which of the people had been a border guard (ATO participant). Serhii the brewer replied that he was. The occupiers put him, his wife Natalia, and three other men (Vadym Zamkovyi, Vasyl Nazarov, Momat Evgeni) on the ground and started shooting both in the air and around them. In the house, the Russian military found a rifle and old walkie-talkies used for dogs. This became the reason to accuse Natalia and her husband of allegedly adjusting the fire for the Ukrainian military. After that, all the men were tied up, bags were put on their heads, and they were dragged into a car and taken to an unknown direction. According to the information available at the time, the men were held by the occupiers in the village of Strilechi in the school's basement. However, when the Ukrainian military liberated the village of Strilecha, they were never found.⁹⁵⁷

Six occupiers broke into the yard of a local woman, Valentyna Motrych, where she was with her daughter-in-law. Threatening them with weapons, they demanded information about the whereabouts of their husbands. When the men returned to the house, the occupiers forced everyone into the basement of the house, where they began beating Oleksandr, the woman's son. He was a hunter and had guns and permits.

When they beat him, he asked the women to hand over all their weapons to the occupiers. A woman under the muzzle of an assault rifle gave the occupiers weapons from the cache. When she returned to the basement, Olexandr's head was broken, he was covered in blood, and the floor contained multiple bullet holes. The man was naked because the occupiers forced him to undress. Then he was dragged out of the basement and taken in an unknown direction.⁹⁵⁸

The Village of Tsupivka

In absentia, the Kharkiv Regional Prosecutor's Office has announced suspicion in the torture of civilian residents in the Kharkiv region to a former 43-year-old law enforcement officer from Luhansk (according to the summons published by the Regional Prosecutor's Office, it concerns Oleh Polezhaiev, a native of the city of Iziium in the Kharkiv Region). «...According to the investigation, in March 2022, the man who had been a police officer in the city of Luhansk joined the illegal armed formation of «LPR,» controlled by the leadership of the aggressor country. During March-April 2022, the man was stationed in the village of Tsupivka of the Kharkiv district, whose territory was under occupation in the specified period. There, the military officer conducted interrogations in a local school, intimidating and torturing four local residents...» the prosecutor's office reported.⁹⁵⁹

CHUHUIV DISTRICT

The City of Vovchansk

In Vovchansk, the occupiers had transferred one of the factories to Russia and were using its premises as a prison, or better yet, as a real concentration camp, where people were

subjected to torture, coerced into cooperating and joining the ranks of the Russian armed forces. «...*Machine-building plant. We used to produce dual-purpose products - both military and civilian, so the facility is fenced off with a reinforced concrete wall topped with barbed wire. There are workshops for accommodating people and administrative buildings. And perhaps because it is situated locally, in the city center and within a fortified area, they established what is called a 'filtration camp' there. Next to the factory, there's a block post near a damaged bridge that people use for crossing. They grab them if they don't like something, for questioning, and then throw people in «jail,» holding them there. Some have been there for months...*» recounted Oleh Toporkov, a deputy of the Vovchansk city council, Kharkiv region. According to him, about 100 people were held in the camp. Of the total number of those who passed the «filter,» at least 10 are missing.⁹⁶⁰

Oleh Toporkov was abducted twice by the Russian occupiers. On March 7, 2022, he and his friends raised a Ukrainian flag on the central square of Vovchansk. The local collaborators, Russian military, and LPR militants visited his place at night. After they searched the house, the deputy was taken to the detention center and then to the Shebekino checkpoint. «...*They shackled everyone, blindfolded, and put everyone on their knees...*» recalled the deputy. After the first kidnapping, the deputy was released. A week later, the occupiers abducted Toporkov for the second time, along with his wife and two other people holding them in Belgorod. «*They took us to the checkpoint, shackled and blindfolded us, put us all on our knees, and handcuffed us,*» said the deputy. According to him, he was persuaded to cooperate under threats of shooting his family. «*They tell you they will shoot your whole family, rape your wife, and torture your children... if you don't cooperate,*» Toporkov recalls. Both the deputy and his wife refused to collaborate with the occupiers. Townspeople helped hide the children. After the abductions, the couple hid in an abandoned building in the central part of Vovchansk. «*We knew that if we*

were exposed, we would be shot. We hid in a crowded place in the city center, but we did so in an abandoned building, where no one could know we were there,» said Toporkov.⁹⁶¹

So many civilians passed through the most horrible torture chamber at the aggregate plant in the Kharkiv region that rumors about it broke through despite the fear of speaking, especially before the liberation, and despite the lack of communication. The director of the lyceum from the village of Ivanivka also went through the aggregate factory's torture chamber. Lidiia Tilna (62) survived several days of solitary confinement in a solitary cell without electricity or food. He experienced beatings and threats to shoot her. It was all because she did not want to start the academic year on September 1, 2022, under the Russian flag. When she tried to leave the area, she was detained and thrown into prison. *«...They took me far away from other people. I fell out of the car and hurt my knees. They said: 'On your knees.' Well, people say I have courage. So I said: «Good people, fear God. What are you doing? I'm a woman, 60 years old.» They aimed their rifles' barrels under my chin: «What kind of information are you taking to Kharkiv, bitch?» I go: «Yeah, what information?» They threw everything from my suitcase, including my documents. They kept asking me: «Where are labor books? Where are stamps? The school keys?»* Lidiia recalled.⁹⁶²

According to the head of the prosecutor's office of the Kharkiv region, the Russian military subjected not only Ukrainians to torture but also foreign citizens: *«For over six months, the Russians held seven Sri Lankan citizens in terrible conditions on the territory of a company, applying moral and physical pressure, and abusing them. Five of them were students of the Kupyansk Medical College; the rest were their relatives...»* After the occupation of Kupyansk, the Sri Lankan citizens tried to leave the city but were stopped and apprehended at one of the Russian checkpoints. The occupiers did not provide the reason. They probably tried to «incriminate»

these citizens for participating in foreign battalions. These foreign citizens were held in the Vovchansk torture chamber from March to September 10 (until the city was liberated by our Defense and Security Forces). They were kept in inhumane conditions and forced to work as cleaners. A woman was kept in solitary confinement for two months. The Russian soldiers tortured people: two men had their nails torn off, one had their head hit against a door; they were subjected to torture, physical and psychological violence. The foreign citizens were in captivity until September 10...»⁹⁶³

According to local witness accounts, the Russians held up to 40 people in one of the torture chambers in the Kharkiv region, located within one of the enterprises in the city of Vovchansk in a cell of 12 square meters. Tools for torture, shackles, strangling devices, etc. were found in the prison premises. Here, the occupiers beat prisoners, tortured them with electric shocks, pulled out their nails and broke their fingers. The dates of people's stay there were written on the walls.⁹⁶⁴

The Village of Hrakove

On September 9, 2022, the bodies of two civilians with traces of torture were discovered in the liberated village of Hrakove. After the liberation, a local resident contacted the police and reported that back in March, the occupiers had killed two unfamiliar men and had forced him to bury them on the village's property. During the examination of the bodies, gunshot wounds in the back of the head and signs of torture were identified. The man also informed the police that when he was burying the bodies, he saw that the ears of the deceased had been cut off.⁹⁶⁵

The Villages of Hrakove and Zaliznychne

From September 9 to 11, 2022, law enforcement officers discovered six bodies of civilians killed by the Russian military in the Hrakove and Zaliznychne settlements in the Chuguyiv district, Kharkiv region. After the murders, the bodies were buried by local residents. Traces of torture were found on the bodies.⁹⁶⁶

The Village of Zaliznychne

According to the Prosecutor General's Office of Ukraine, on September 11, 2022, Ukrainian law enforcement officers discovered four bodies in the liberated village of Zaliznychne. All of them bore signs of torture. Three were buried on the territory of their homes, and one more was interred on the territory of the asphalt plant opposite the railway station. According to preliminary investigations, the victims were killed by the Russian military during the occupation of this settlement.⁹⁶⁷

9. KHERSON REGION

According to the Human Rights Commissioner of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, Dmytro Lubinets, residents of the Kherson region were subjected to more brutal methods of torture than in other regions previously under temporary occupation (the Kharkiv, Kyiv, and Chernihiv regions). Torture chambers were discovered in the Chernihiv, Kharkiv, and Kyiv regions. However, for the first time, instances were established (based on the testimonies of individuals who had been held in these torture chambers) of men and women being held together in the cells for weeks, around the clock in the Kherson region. Women had to go to the toilet in front of men, and men in front of women. The second difference between the torture chambers in the Kherson Region and the Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Kharkiv regions is that video cameras were installed in each cell for surveillance. *«Such round-the-clock video surveillance was recorded with sound. This was specifically attested by our citizens subjected to torture, who explained that they clearly understood this. Because as soon as the people of Kherson started talking about the occupation, people in masks immediately entered the cells and brutally beat everyone.»*⁹⁶⁸

According to Dmytro Lubinets, people were brought to such a dire state that some of them even requested to be killed. After liberating the territory, Ukrainian law enforcement officers seized parts of rubber batons, a wooden bat, a device used by the occupiers to torture civilians with electric shocks, an incandescent lamp, and bullets from the walls in the occupiers' torture chambers. According to law enforcement bodies, various methods of torture and physical and



psychological violence were used against people in the cells and basements.⁹⁶⁹

According to the permanent representative of the President of Ukraine in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Tamila Tasheva, the invaders are keeping about 500 people in basements, including activists and participants in the Anti-Terrorist Operation. «...According to our information, about 500 people are actually being held «in the basements,» where they are tortured...» Both in Kherson and on the administrative border with Crimea, e.g., in the village of Novooleksiivka and in the city of Henichesk, the occupying «administrations» or the Russian military have lists of activists, including those who participated in the civil blockade of Crimea in 2015 and those in the ATO. They come to these people's homes and apprehend and abduct them.⁹⁷⁰

The Russians hunt for individuals with pro-Ukrainian positions in the occupied territories. Patriots are being subjected to 're-education' involving torture through starvation and the deprivation of their liberty. They are coerced into watching Russian television, listening to Russian songs, and memorizing 'Soviet' poems. Furthermore, they are provided with only one meal per day. Occasionally, on the fourth day, a prisoner is released to return home, but their changed views are assessed. If their beliefs remain unchanged, they are returned to the basement, often for an extended duration. At this stage, Russian criminals torture Ukrainians, and they provide them with only a glass of sugar instead of proper nutrition. People with the greatest willpower and patriotism are «attached» to FSB officers who torture the prisoners, do not allow them to sleep, and transport them to other locations. At the same time, their loved ones do not have any information about the whereabouts of the missing persons.⁹⁷¹

According to Oleksii Tylnenko, the Chairman of the Board of Human Rights Organization «Crimea SOS,» his organization documented at least 600 instances of enforced

disappearances during the occupation of the Kherson region (as a rule, Ukrainians abducted by the occupiers were taken to Crimea annexed by Russia). *«...As a rule, people are taken to the occupied Crimea from the occupied Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions. Some are kept in pre-trial detention centers, police or SBU stations for three days, weeks. Some are held and tortured there for months. It all depends on the individual and the circumstances of their forced disappearance and abduction.»*⁹⁷²

In the occupied territories of the Kherson region, Russian occupiers resort to threats and public punishments as a means to coerce individuals who refuse to accept Russian passports. The slow pace of passport issuance has led to systematic reprimands from Kremlin overseers to the occupation administrations. The harassment of the civilian population involves intimidation, including threats of being thrown into a 'pit,' as well as public spectacles of punishment, where men are placed in sacks and cast into trenches. In Henichesk, the invaders brutally torture citizens with pro-Ukrainian views and those who do not want to comply with the demands of the so-called local occupation authorities. This was reported by the National Resistance Center on March 25, 2023.⁹⁷³

First Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs Yevhenii Yenin spoke about the torture chambers discovered in the liberated territory of the Kherson region: *«We are witnessing a recurring pattern in the formerly occupied territories. It is evident that so-called torture chambers were extensively employed within police stations, where individuals were subjected to utterly inhumane conditions. Additionally, humanitarian convoys were targeted with gunfire. Furthermore, numerous property-related crimes perpetrated by the occupiers against the civilian population have been reported.»*⁹⁷⁴

In one of the basements, people were detained without being allowed to go to the toilet. Electric shocks were applied to the prisoners. The walls were covered with prayers.

According to Andrii Kovalenko, the head of the department for combating crimes committed in the context of military conflicts of the Kherson regional prosecutor's office, *«electric shocks were often applied to residents of the Kherson regions apprehended by the occupiers. Special wires were attached to their genitals, nipples, and ears, and water was poured over them. Following this, a so-called «good investigator» approached the person and said they could stop it. The prisoner was transferred to another cell, where they heard others being beaten. This was a type of psychological torture. As a rule, the Russians received the information they needed using these and similar methods...»* In the liberated Beryslav area, two people died from beatings in one of the torture chambers. Additionally, the prosecutor of the Kherson region, Volodymyr Kaliuha, mentioned instances when prisoners were released and taken to minefields. Sometimes they were set free after relatives sought and demanded their release. *«...There were cases, as confirmed by our investigations, where individuals returned from such places and subsequently passed away at home due to severe beatings. Therefore, these horrors are pervasive throughout the region. What we have already examined and documented includes incidents in the village of Biliaievka in the Beryslav district, Arkhanhelsk, Oleksandrivka, and now in Kherson...»*⁹⁷⁵

The Russian military abducted a retired Kherson police lieutenant colonel named Oleh Khudiakov to «persuade» him to collaborate with them. His consent to treason was coerced out of him, as is usual, by exploiting the most painful thing - threats to his loved ones. Unable to protect them in any other way and unwilling to collaborate with the invaders, the man made the terrible decision of ending his own life. He probably hoped that at least after that the tormentors would leave his wife and daughter alone.⁹⁷⁶

Russian soldiers brutally abused an 83-year-old retired lady in the Kherson region. *«...When the occupiers entered my*

house, one of them began to shake me from side to side, demanding that I give him vodka and cigarettes. I don't understand why they thought I had that... I didn't think that I would suffer from such abuse in my old age. They held my neck and hit my head and my back. Even now I shudder at the memory of it. I live together with a paralyzed husband, and he had to listen to everything being done to me. He felt much worse than me because he couldn't help me...»⁹⁷⁷

According to law enforcement, on March 31, 2023, an indictment was sent to the court on the charge of a Russian serviceman who raped a 32-year-old resident of the Kherson region for four months, threatening the victim and her nine-year-old son with physical violence.⁹⁷⁸

According to law enforcement, the commander of the 15th special unit «Vyatich» of the Federal Service of the National Guard of Russia, while on the territory of the temporarily occupied Ivanovo Territorial Community in the Kherson Region, gave orders to his subordinates regarding the illegal detention and use of violence against the civilian population. Their goal was to suppress the resistance of the local population in implementing the policy of the occupying power and to coerce Ukrainian citizens into cooperating. On his instructions, in May 2022, Russian army members used force to unlawfully apprehend a family member of the head of the village council and place him in the seized premises of the police station. For several hours, the Russian Guard members extracted information from the man, after which he was released. Similar actions were taken against a close relative and the head of the Starostiv district. In order to coerce the old man into collaborating, the occupiers beat, psychologically pressured, and tortured him with electric shocks.⁹⁷⁹

In one of the villages in the Inhulets area, the Russian soldiers raped local residents, namely a pregnant 16-year-old girl and her 78-year-old grandmother.⁹⁸⁰

BERYSLAV DISTRICT

«During the routine inspection of the area in an urban-type settlement in the Beryslav district, law enforcement officers discovered the remains of human bodies in a cellar. According to preliminary data, they belong to three local residents who died during the occupation of the settlement,» the Telegram channel of the Prosecutor General's Office said.⁹⁸¹

According to law enforcement, a 48-year-old Russian soldier lived in the house of a Ukrainian woman for several months during the occupation of the Kherson region and raped her constantly. The occupier threatened the woman to kill her young son if she resisted. According to Ukrainian law enforcement officers, the 34th separate motorized rifle mountain brigade of the Russian army was stationed in the Beryslav district of the Kherson region at the end of March. The Russian occupiers deployed their equipment there, looting and intimidating the local population. The Russians also regularly searched the houses of civilians. During one of these «raids» Aleksander Rubanov started making unwanted advances on a woman who lived alone with her young son. Rubanov took advantage of the fact that the Ukrainian woman did not have the opportunity to leave the occupied village and began to threaten to kill her child if she refused to have sexual relations with him. The man also threatened the woman that he would bring all the Russian soldiers into the village to abuse her. After raping and threatening to kill the victim with a knife, the occupier decided to live in her home to regularly rape her.⁹⁸²

The City of Beryslav

On May 16, 2022, military journalist Andrii Tsaplienko reported thousands of cars stuck on the way out of the occupied Kherson region. According to him, the detention of cars with Ukrainians was reported by people who had been waiting in

a multi-kilometer line near Beryslav toward Kryvvi Rih for 4 days. «...*Exhausted civilians want to leave for the Ukrainian-controlled territory, but they are not allowed to pass through the Russian checkpoints. Cars filled with children, women, and elderly people wait day and night in the fields, enduring harsh conditions without access to proper food and shelter. Furthermore, their proximity to the front line, with its ongoing battles, poses a significant danger to them.*»⁹⁸³

The Village of Biliaivka

According to the Head of the Novoaleksandrivka community of the Beryslav district of the Kherson region, after the liberation of the community's settlements, Ukrainian law enforcement officers discovered a torture chamber on the territory of the lyceum in the village of Biliaivka. ...»*There was a torture chamber on the territory of the Biliaivka Lyceum in the village of Biliaivka. The Russian military apprehended local residents and residents of the surrounding villages....» «... The residents checked were subjected to physical violence... the Russian military made rounds of yards, checking computers and mobile phones...»* According to Serhii Nikitenko, editor-in-chief of the «Most» [Bridge – ed.] publication, who communicated with the residents of Biliaivka after the liberation, one local resident was still looking for her husband, who had been abducted by the Russian military along with other men back in April. This woman claimed that she did not know the exact number, but several had been kidnapped and tortured. Her husband disappeared afterward. She thought he had been killed and was still looking for any information about him or his body.⁹⁸⁴

The Village of Bruskinske

In the village of Bruskinske, the body of a 63-year-old local resident tortured by the Russians during the occupation was discovered at the village cemetery. The police have preliminarily established that the man was killed by Russian invaders in September 2022.⁹⁸⁵

The Village of Velyka Oleksandrivka

During the occupation of the village of Velyka Oleksandrivka, the occupiers brutally tortured the civilian population in front of the local police station. In particular, one woman's entire family was killed while she was in captivity. The woman herself was tortured with electric shocks just because she had expressed her wish that the Ukrainian flag should hang over the local school instead of the tricolor.⁹⁸⁶

The occupiers came to the house of Olha, a resident of the village of Velyka Oleksandrivka, who was in her last days of pregnancy. They demanded that the woman go to Rostov. Olha refused. Earlier, they had taken away her husband and kept him in the «basement» for three days. When he was brought back, Olha could not recognize him: *«...he was gaunt, badly beaten. His head was wrapped in a bloody sheet. My husband was then taken to the city of Kakhovka...»* Serhii Balan, Olha's husband, worked as a village policeman. According to him, when the occupiers entered the village, they began to «work on» the local policemen. During the search of the house, they found a shirt with military chevrons from the school of their late son (who died one year before the events) and began accusing Serhii of having served in the ATO. He had really participated in the ATO, but the occupiers did not know that at the time. Then they found more military attributes of their late son, including the «Azov» chevrons. Serhii was taken away for questioning, where they hit his legs with a metal pipe. The torture chamber

had been set up by the occupiers in the garage basement of one of the buildings. There was no electricity, and it was very damp and cold, with only wooden pallets on the floor. After learning that Serhii was a policeman, they took him to the garage, seated him in a chair and, holding a gun to his left ear, shot over his head. They loaded a non-combat pistol that fired little metal «bullets,» pointed it at his groin, and fired. After that, Serhii was thrown into the basement and told they would interrogate him at night. In the middle of the night, the Russian soldiers (about five of them) came down to the basement and started firing shots there. Then they began to beat him with their feet and hands, hitting his head with dishes. Serhii passed out. The occupiers brought him to consciousness by dousing him with water. Then they made him undress and show his body for tattoos. They beat him again. FSB representatives arrived in the morning. They lifted Serhii from the basement, put a white bag over his head, and transferred him to the house next door, where they began interrogating him about weapons from the police station. Since Serhii refused to answer, the FSB officers began to torture him with electric shocks and threatened the health of his pregnant wife. As a result of the torture, he began to hallucinate. The next day, he was taken home for an inspection. When Serhii showed where his service weapon was buried, the occupiers calmed down a little but said he would go to Nova Kakhovka. They put a bag on his head and led him away. There he was kept on the territory of the district station in a cell where everyone had tattoos. One of the men, who had recently been badly beaten, was told by the occupiers that if he removed the tattoo during the night, no one from the cell would be touched. Therefore, the man had to cut out his tattoo.⁹⁸⁷

The Settlement of Vysokopillia

The occupiers abducted local people en masse, especially activists who opposed the occupation. After the abductions,

the mutilated bodies of these people were discovered in ditches and fields. Those who managed to flee from the occupation mentioned in conversations with human rights defenders that they had seen mass burial sites.⁹⁸⁸



Viktor Apostol was detained and imprisoned by the Russian military. They shot him in the leg because they found a walkie-talkie and suspected him of espionage.⁹⁸⁹

The Village of Havrylivka

According to the editor-in-chief of the «Most» publication, during his visit to the liberated Novooleksandrivka community, one of the residents of Havrylivka told him that Russian soldiers had killed her grandson and then began telling local residents that a Ukrainian sniper had killed him (at the time, the village was already far from the front line and no sniper could have been there). After the guy was murdered, the Russians abducted his father (this woman's son), drove him around the highway with a gun pointed at his temple, and intimidated him, telling him to keep silent about it.⁹⁹⁰

The Village of Mylove

Oleh Yakhniyenko, the head of the village of Mylove in the Kherson region, was apprehended twice by the occupiers. He

had a pro-Ukrainian position refusing to collaborate with the occupiers. They captured him for the first time in March 2022 and held him in captivity for almost a month. He was detained for the second time in July of the same year. Pressured by the occupiers, he surrendered the powers of the head of the village council, after which the Russians appointed their female assistant. On the following day, it became known about the second abduction of Oleh by the occupiers.⁹⁹¹

HENICHESK DISTRICT

The City of Henichesk

The occupiers set up a torture chamber in a vocational school in Henichesk. There they brutally abused Ukrainians who openly held pro-Ukrainian positions, as well as representatives of the Crimean Tatar people.⁹⁹²

The occupiers set up another torture chamber in the basements of the former city tax inspectorate. There they hold local residents with pro-Ukrainian positions. First, people are tortured, then their property is seized, and they are killed.⁹⁹³

The occupiers detained and arrested the former captain of the Ukrainian ship «Slavutich,» Oleksii Kiseliyov, who was in Henichesk on July 22, 2022. The man was walking down the street, when suddenly a black minibus stopped near him, two strangers got out of it, calling each other «Shaman» and «Biker.» Kiselyov recounts that two men in balaclavas attacked him, broke his arms, and loaded him into their minibus, after which they took him in an unknown direction. «...*On the way, they asked me what my call sign was, and where the weapons of the Henichesk Territorial Defense were hidden. I said I didn't understand what they were asking me about, as I had nothing to do with it...*» said the former captain. Then the occupiers brought him to his house and began a search. They also stole

his car. Oleksii could not do anything because of the bag they had put over his head. After the search, he was taken to vocational technical school No. 17, where the Russian Guard unit was based and detention cells were located in the basement. Interrogations began there. The questions were asked by a Russian soldier with the call sign «Tractorist,» who also wore a balaclava. «...After the interrogation, I was pushed into another room where I spent the night. In the morning, a man came to me, put a T-shirt over my head so that I could not see, and led me to another room. They started asking me questions again, but this time they used violence and electric shocks. Similar tortures were carried out daily for several hours... « According to Kiseliov, the occupiers asked him about the location of the weapons of the Henichesk Territorial Defense, his callsign, the callsign of his subordinates waiting for his orders, and what data he was passing on to the special services of Ukraine about the situation in the city of Henichesk. On July 27, the man was brought to the administrative border with the occupied peninsula and handed over to the employees of the Crimean FSB department, who believed Oleksiy had been supplying products to other members of his battalion to prepare them for the naval blockade of the Crimean peninsula, teaching the management of naval vessels, and «so far has not announced his voluntary termination of participation in an illegal armed formation under Part 2 of Article 208 of the Criminal Code of Russia.»⁹⁹⁴

The occupiers apprehended a young man in the city after 10 p.m. For violating the curfew, he was sent «to the basement» in building 17 of the Higher Vocational School. According to the locals, the boy's acquaintances had been collecting money for several days in a row as a ransom. They did that to prevent the Russians from torturing the Ukrainian.⁹⁹⁵

The Village of Strilkove

According to the General Staff of the AFU, the occupiers set up a torture chamber in the settlement of Strilkove in Henichesk district, Kherson region, on the territory of a recreation center, where they hold and torture Ukrainian citizens. Ukrainians (inhabitants of the Kherson region and local residents) who disagree with the occupiers' actions are brought there.⁹⁹⁶

KAKHOVKA DISTRICT

In one of the villages of the temporarily occupied Kakhovka district, the invaders shot a 38-year-old man for his pro-Ukrainian position.⁹⁹⁷

The Settlement of Hornostaivka

According to the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the Russian military had set up a torture chamber in the building of the former Hornostaivska district police station in the Kherson region in which Ukrainian patriots were held. People were sent there for being accused of cooperation with the Armed Forces of Ukraine, which was ungrounded.⁹⁹⁸

The Village of Hryhorivka

According to Nina Hryhorivna, a resident of the village of Havrylivka, in the first days of the occupation, her son and minor grandson were on their way to get humanitarian aid. When the occupiers' vehicles drove through the village, her grandson got scared and started running to save himself. The occupiers shot him. The body of the child was taken away to

the town of Nova Kahovka, as the occupiers said. They apprehended his father, Serhii, at the site of the incident and, holding a weapon to his temple, drove him for more than an hour, coercing him into keeping silent about what had happened.⁹⁹⁹

The Village of Zelenyi Pod

On August 5, 2022, armed Russian soldiers abducted from her own home Olena Peleshok, the head of the village of Zelenyi Pod. The occupiers kept her in captivity for over two months. The main purpose of this was to force cooperation with the occupiers.¹⁰⁰⁰

Kakhovka

According to a Kakhovka activist, during an action against the occupation in the city on April 3, 2022, the Russian military apprehended five local residents and took them to an unknown destination. The detainees were released within three days, during which time they were subjected to torture. *«According to our information, those taken by the Russian military were held in Nova Kakhovka. I know that the guys were beaten, severely beaten on the first day. Some were coerced, or they called for medical help right there in Nova Kakhovka, and one even had surgery. What kind of surgery it was – whether limbs were broken or internal organs were injured, I don't know, I can't say. But the fact that they were subjected to mockery and abuse – that is indeed true,»* the woman said. According to her, the Russian military «threatens detainees, brainwashes them not to go to rallies, and intimidates families with massacres and using armored personnel carriers against them.»¹⁰⁰¹

The occupiers also actively searched for «sabotage groups» and «fire adjusters» in Kakhovka. The detainees were brought to the village of Hornostaivka, where they were tortured

to extract their testimonies. The same things happened in Borivske and Shchedryshchevo, Luhansk region: mass searches, seizure of mobile phones, abductions, and deportations of people in an unknown direction.¹⁰⁰²

The Village of Liubymivka

After the liberation of the village in October 2022, Mariia (an elderly woman) said that residents Liubymivka, including her and her husband, were brought to a local school, where the occupiers had set up their headquarters, and led blindfolded down the corridor to one of the classrooms. There she was seated in a chair, and her husband was hit on the head with a gun and fell to his knees. The couple's phones were snatched, and they were blindfolded and thrown into the basement (a very small basement, the «entrance» to which was a hole in the classroom floor made by the enemy). Mariia constantly cried and prayed loudly. The woman almost had a heart attack from this stress. The occupiers dragged her and her husband out of the basement and gave them water after a long period of abuse. According to Mariia, they were released only because she felt very sick. After that, the occupiers interrogated this elderly couple for another day, accusing them of collaborating with the AFU. Other village residents also testified that the occupiers had tortured many local residents for several weeks in this school, feeding them once every three days, beating them, and physically abusing them in every way.¹⁰⁰³

Nova Kakhovka

In the forest near Nova Kakhovka, Kherson region, the occupiers tortured the pastor of the Ukrainian Church of Evangelical Christians and his 19-year-old son (Anatolii and Oleksandr Prokopchuk), who held pro-Ukrainian positions and provided assistance to the local population during the

occupation. Anatolii and his wife were raising seven children, including one minor. Their bodies were badly mutilated but possible to identify.¹⁰⁰⁴

The occupiers tortured to death 34-year-old Serhii Fedorenko, a volunteer from the Kherson region. Serhii refused to leave Nova Kakhovka after the onset of the full-scale invasion. He actively volunteered delivering drinking water and searching for missing people. The man twice was thrown into the «basement» twice by the Russian occupiers for his pro-Ukrainian position. The second time he got there was on January 3, 2023, when representatives of the Russian occupational authorities of Nova Kakhovka stopped the car in which he was traveling with the driver. The driver was released a few days after a ransom was paid. The city's occupational police informed Serhii's friends that he would also be released in two or three days, but it did not happen. The occupiers informed Serhii's father that his son had developed a «frenzy,» so he had been taken to the hospital. Serhii Fedorenko was admitted to the Kakhovka Hospital in grave condition on January 7. A colleague of the volunteer went there to see him. After his stay in captivity, the man's body had no «parts unharmed»: his body bore signs of brutal beatings. He had seven hematomas on his head, and his legs were broken. He had a tube in his mouth and breathed heavily. Serhii died from injuries as a result of torture.¹⁰⁰⁵

According to the mayor of Nova Kakhovka, V. Kovalenko, the occupiers held local residents in the basement of the former police building torturing and coercing them into cooperating. Among them was a school principal, who later switched to their side. He stayed there for 17 days, tried to take his own life and cut his veins...¹⁰⁰⁶

The Settlement of Chaplynka

According to the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the Russian occupiers set up a torture chamber in the police department in the Chaplynka ATC in the Kherson region, in which up to 10 civilians, including minors, are being held. They keep people in cruel, inhumane conditions and torture them. «...*There have been instances of those kidnapped being tortured to death by the Russian terrorists...*»¹⁰⁰⁷

On June 9, 2022, after a day of searching, a daughter found her father, Valentyn, in the local police station, where the Russian occupiers were stationed. The day before, 48-year-old Valentyn left the house for shopping but never returned. The occupiers told the daughter that he was being held «for drug possession» but did not say where they were holding him. The mother went to the police station daily, and eventually she was allowed to see her son. She told her daughter that Valentyn «... *was all beaten up, and he had lost a lot of weight...*» During her next visit, the staff told her that he had been transferred to Crimea. The occupiers released Valentyn about a month after his detention. The man told his relatives he had been beaten and sent off to Crimea for «correctional labor» for two weeks. His identity documents and bank cards were never returned to him, and he was also forbidden to leave the village. His daughter said the Russian military also apprehended several other villagers on June 8, 2022, but she had no information about them.¹⁰⁰⁸

The Russian occupiers abducted Iryna Horobtsova from her own home for her active pro-Ukrainian position. «... *Horobtsova was kidnapped on her birthday. The woman condemned the Russian invasion of the territory of Ukraine and the capture of her native city on social networks...*» According to the Verkhovna Rada Commissioner for Human Rights, the Russians had been trying for a week to force a confession out

of Iryna to allegedly directing fire at the invaders at the famous Chornobaivka airfield...»¹⁰⁰⁹

SKADOVSK DISTRICT

According to law enforcement, a serviceman of one of the units of the armed forces of Russia was appointed the so-called «commandant - chief of the garrison» at the beginning of the occupation of the Kherson region. He was stationed in the village of Lazurne. He was personally engaged and giving instructions and orders regarding the detention and torture of local residents with a pro-Ukrainian position, as well as illegally seized real estate. The suspect and his accomplices (the Russian military) detained the head of one of the village councils of the Skadovsk district. The latter was held in the basement of a boarding house, systematically subjected to beatings, threatened with massacre, and shot over the head in an imitation of execution. The man was asked to provide information about pro-Ukrainian activists and local residents, as well as coerced into cooperating.¹⁰¹⁰

Vladyslav (name changed) was detained during the filtering events in Armiansk because his name was on the lists of activists being sought by the occupiers. A bag was put on the man's head, and he was taken to an unknown direction (it was later revealed to be the Skadovsk area where the occupiers had set up a prison on the territory of one of the recreation centers). For three days, Vladyslav lay in a cramped building, tied up and with a sack on his head. After that, they threw him into a car and drove him around for half an hour. When they took him out of the car and removed the bag from his head, he found himself in front of a large pit filled with dead bodies. They said to him: «*Do you want to go in there?*» He replied: «*Of course not.*» Then they started shooting in the air. Vladyslav was very frightened, but the Russian military laughed. They put a bag on the man's head and threw him into another

building. There were no interrogations all this time. On the fourth day, FSB investigators recovered all messages and links in Vladyslav's phone and began interrogating him, intimidating him, and coercing him into collaborating. Later, interrogations took place every morning. At night, an executioner entered the cell and beat Vladyslav with his hands and feet. According to him, there was an entire group of executioners, all of them young Russians. He got the impression that this role was given to scumbags who liked to torture others. He said he saw and heard other people being tortured much more severely. There were many women there, but the occupiers did not give them special treatment since Vladyslav heard their screams all the time. He also saw a man tied to a tree, who had not been given water and food for several days, and who was then taken down and dragged to the side. He had no idea whether the man was alive. Vladyslav was released two weeks later only after agreeing to cooperate with the Russians.¹⁰¹¹

KAKHOVKA DISTRICT

The Settlements of Kalanchak and Chaplynka

The occupiers brutally tortured two former servicemen. The Russian military came and took away the former military member named Andrii, who had served in the ATO, directly from the house in the village on the outskirts of Kherson. The beatings began immediately and continued on the way to the Russians' base. His ribs were broken, cigarette butts were put out against his back, and he was hit in the chest around the heart with a metal statuette of Lenin. Andrii was taken to an unknown place with a bag on his head. They tore his clothes, beat him with a rubber baton, and kicked him. After that, he was sent to a cell and ordered to stand. Every hour, one of the occupiers came to see whether Andrii was not sitting. Andrii

stood like that for almost two days after all the abuse and beatings. His legs turned black, and he fell and could not get up. Then they began to torture him with electric shocks. His hands were tied behind his back, handcuffs were put on, he was placed on bunks, and used the «little crocodiles» [clamps] to connect the wires. Then they connected more wires with voltage to his ears. Overall, Andrii spent two weeks in captivity, first in Kalanchak and then in Chaplynka. Then he was released. Andrii also testified that his friend Nazar Kahainiah died after such torture.¹⁰¹²

The City of Skadovsk

A man from Skadovsk was brutally tortured by the occupiers. He was a volunteer, a member of one of the local patrols that had replaced the police, working at a humanitarian aid distribution center. After his father was captured in April 2022, a few weeks after the occupation, the man went looking for him and was also apprehended by the occupiers. During the interrogation, the Russian military asked the man about other local activists and about his connections with the Ukrainian security agencies (he had no connections) and the CIA (none), as well as with the George Soros Foundation (unfounded). He said he was beaten by four occupiers at the same time. They beat him with a hammer and a baseball bat and tortured him with electric shocks, trying to get him to admit his participation in a larger conspiracy. One of his ribs was broken. Later, the man was ordered to make a video confession and sign a statement that he would not spread «fake news» about the Russian occupation. After the detention and release, he left the region.¹⁰¹³

The Village of Stara Zburyivka

The occupiers apprehended the village head of Stara Zburyivka (60-year-old Viktor Maruniak) and three other men on March 21, 2022. They held him blindfolded and handcuffed for three days. Both Viktor and other men had pro-Ukrainian positions, opposing the occupation as much as possible. The occupiers believed Viktor was a secret member of a Ukrainian «subversive group» and subjected him to beatings. They did not feed the man at all and gave him little to drink. Once, he was stripped naked and forced to stand in the cold for several hours. They put a gun to Viktor's head and threatened to drown him. They said his wife and daughter would also be taken away. According to him, Russian soldiers strangled him until he passed out. They kept asking him where he had his weapons stash. A few days after his detention, Viktor briefly saw his wife, Kateryna Ohar, before being transported to Kherson. The Russian military told Kateryna that she would not see her husband for the next 20 years. After that, Viktor was sent to another torture room, where other Russian soldiers tied wires to his thumbs (in this form of torture, wires are attached to the fingers and toes, and sometimes to the victim's genitals.) Then a current is applied from the battery of a field phone (according to a witness, the soldiers called it «a call to Putin.» After several days of imprisonment without food, he was released with nine broken ribs and pneumonia. He left the occupation zone.¹⁰¹⁴

KHERSON DISTRICT

The Settlement of Bilozerka

Immediately after the occupation of the village, the occupiers searched for and apprehended the village deputy who held a pro-Ukrainian position like his wife. As Oleksandr

himself testified, the occupiers tied a rope around his neck and another one around his wrists and they made him stand with his legs wide apart during the interrogations. When Oleksandr did not answer the occupiers' questions, they struck him between the legs. When he fell, he began to suffocate from the rope tied around his neck. When he tried to get up, the Russian executioners struck him again. They put a bag on his head, threatening that he would lose his kidneys.¹⁰¹⁵

The Village of Blahodatne

The occupiers apprehended and tortured all local residents with a pro-Ukrainian position. Among them were Viktor Buliuk, Andrii Yavnichenko, Oleh Borodin, and several other fellow villagers. They had been expressing their pro-Ukrainian positions, negative attitudes toward the Russian military and their invasion of Ukraine's territory. The occupiers began to search for this group of local activists, in particular, they were looking for Andrii. However, they did not find him in his apartment. When outside, they saw Viktor, Oleh, and several other men. One of the Russian soldiers pointed to Viktor as one of those close to Andrii. He was captured and taken to their location in the village. Simultaneously, other men were held close at gunpoint. Viktor was subjected to beatings to make him speak about Andrii's hiding place. They struck him all over the body, in particular, his legs, back, and hands. They also hit him under the eyes and shoved a grenade into his chest. The whole time, the occupiers continued looking for Andrii. Since he was not found, Viktor and the others were released. The occupiers ordered Viktor to leave the village for Russia or Crimea by the end of the day, threatening he would be «done in» otherwise. These threats were made with an assault rifle pointed to the man's neck.¹⁰¹⁶

The Russian military came to the house of a local resident, a former serviceman of the 79th Airborne Assault Brigade. At

the time, they were looking for anyone who had anything to do with military service. According to his mother, Nina Sirokha, he could no longer leave the village, as the occupiers were guarding the outskirts of the village. In the initial days of the occupation, Nina was wounded after a rocket attack, so her son agreed with the village head to evacuate her to the city. According to the mother, her son called her in the first days. However, he informed her a few days later about the «guests» (Russian soldiers) coming to their home, searching the house, looking for documents, etc. On March 31, 2022, the occupiers arrived at their house on a BMP infantry fighting vehicle and took him away. Yurii Karpinski, who was in the house with her son at the time, was also apprehended. The men's whereabouts have been unknown since then.¹⁰¹⁷

The City of Oleshky

The Russian occupiers showed a video of torturing a civilian in the Kherson region. It was Serhii Moroz, a resident of Oleshky. They beat him up and electrocuted him. The video shows the process of the occupiers' torturing Serhii with electric shocks and blood running down his face. The man was accused of allegedly stealing the belongings of a Russian serviceman when the latter died.¹⁰¹⁸

Nazar Kahalniak, an ATO veteran from the village of Abyrkosivka, died from torture at the hands of the Russian invaders. The man was abused because he had previously participated in hostilities. After the ATO, Nazar suffered two heart attacks and had a complex heart surgery. The occupiers abducted the man from his home, and severely beat and tortured him as a former service member. Mutilated from torture, Nazar was brought home by the occupiers. After his condition deteriorated critically, he was taken to the Oleshky hospital, where he died.¹⁰¹⁹

According to S. Danylov, deputy director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, «...For almost a month, we heard about detentions, psychological pressure, and beatings in the Kherson region. The victims were activists and randomly apprehended citizens expressing their disagreement. They were snatched around rallies or kidnapped from their homes. However, over the past week, information has appeared about severe torture, people who became disabled from this torture, and about strokes. In particular, such information was shared by the mayor of Oleshky regarding the members of the Oleshok self-defense formations, all of whom were apprehended, and many were tortured there. People are either in intensive care, have had strokes, or are disabled...»¹⁰²⁰

The Village of Pravdyne

According to reports from law enforcement agencies, the commander of the marine unit of the Black Sea Fleet of the Navy of the Armed Forces of Russia from March 2022 and his subordinates ensured the occupation of settlements in the Kherson region. In the occupied territory, he organized and controlled the processes relating to suppressing the resistance of the local population and implementing the policy of the occupying power, including coercing Ukrainian citizens into cooperating, filtering measures, and more. In April 2022, in the village of Pravdyne, the suspect and his accomplices detained the company employees guarding irrigation units near the village, as well as a minor girl. Six men and a girl were brought to a private house, where they were physically abused and shot dead. After that, the occupiers blew up the house with the deceased inside. In November, after the liberation of the settlement by the AFU, the prosecutor's office of the Kherson region and police investigators and experts conducted an exhumation and examination of the bodies of those killed in this building. The examination revealed signs of

violent death. Some of them had damaged skulls due to bullet wounds. Ropes were found on the wrists of two others.¹⁰²¹

A new mass grave of those killed by the Russian occupiers was discovered on the outskirts of Kherson. In particular, in the village of Pravdyne, bodies were found blindfolded and with bound hands. All of them were shot in the back of the head at close range. After the murders, the occupants blew up the house. The local residents later buried the bodies in a grave near the house. According to the investigation, eight people were killed in the house after an informant told the Russian troops that they were passing information to the Ukrainian military.¹⁰²²

The Villages of Stanislav and Tomyna Balka

According to Serhii Danylov, deputy director of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, the Russian military massively detained local men, regardless of age. They were held in pits, severely beaten indiscriminately for no apparent reason. He is investigating the events in the south of Ukraine. He has many friends and acquaintances there who told him about detentions and torture. «...*My friend, an ATO veteran, had a screw screwed into his knee. They do such things to people there. He can't walk...*» said Serhii Danylov.¹⁰²³

The City of Kherson

According to law enforcement, from April to May 2022, an illegal armed formation was created in Kherson with the support of the Russian military command, namely «The State Security Service of the Kherson Region.» The main task of this structure was to suppress any manifestations for not recognizing the policy of the occupation authorities among the civilian population. Representatives of the so-called service sought and detained Ukrainian citizens, pro-Ukrainian activists,

opponents of the occupation authorities, and other civilians. The law enforcement officers established that in one of the seized buildings in Kherson, the members of this formation had set up illegal imprisonment facilities for torturing people. Civilians were held in inhumane conditions, and psychological and physical violence was applied to them. They were subjected to daily beatings and electric shocks. They had limited food supply and no water. The illegal formation's members simulated the execution of the victims. Civilians were detained under various pretexts, and in some cases, they could only be released after paying a «ransom.»¹⁰²⁴

On May 11, 2023, Ukrainian law enforcement officers **announced** that the organizer of the torture chamber in Kherson and his accomplices were suspected of cruel treatment of prisoners. They meant Aleksandr Naumenko, the deputy chief of the Russian Guard of the Rostov region, with the call sign «Alpha.» This is his second suspicion of the cruel treatment of prisoners. Suspicions were also announced against three of his henchmen - Russian servicemembers Aleksandr Chilengirov, Anver Muksimov, and Aleksandr Bocharov. According to official information, from March to October 2022, the Russian military seized a detention center in Kherson and tortured more than 200 local residents there. The occupiers held some of them for a few hours, and others for months.¹⁰²⁵

In March 2022, during the temporary occupation of Kherson, an employee of the Department of Operational Information of the FSB of Russia and his accomplices (the Russian military) entered the apartment of a local resident. They conducted an illegal search and stole valuables. Later, threatening to massacre the family and using physical violence, the victim was taken to a captured building in the city center. There, the soldiers continued to beat the man, simulated his execution by firing a gun near his head and psychologically pressuring him to cooperate.¹⁰²⁶

According to law enforcement agencies, in the spring of 2022, during the temporary occupation of the city of Kherson, Russian military personnel unlawfully apprehended a local resident. The man was placed in a basement, which the occupiers had equipped for imprisoning and torturing citizens. According to preliminary data, he was tortured for two weeks, which caused his death. During the pre-trial investigation, the law enforcement officers established the place of burial of the tortured man and exhumed his body. A superficial examination revealed signs of numerous injuries, including broken ribs.¹⁰²⁷

The Kherson Regional Prosecutor's Office and police investigators and experts exhumed the bodies of two men tortured to death by the Russian military. According to the investigation, the dead were local residents. During the temporary occupation of Kherson, Russian servicemen illegally detained men almost a month apart. They were placed in a temporary detention center, which the occupiers had set up for imprisoning and torturing citizens. A superficial examination of the tortured revealed signs of numerous injuries, including broken ribs.¹⁰²⁸

The Russian military «picked up» local residents when they suspected or had information that a person had been a policeman or even a security guard in a supermarket. Any law enforcement agency experience could be a reason for detention. According to local residents, the detainees disappeared after that. There were many instances of finding the «disappeared» people dead with traces of brutal torture on their bodies. The cousin of a local resident named Natalia also «disappeared» and was later found dead with traces of brutal torture on his body. According to another woman, «...*she saw bodies being taken to the field several times from the window of her apartment in Kherson. They got them out of the car, took them a little further away from the road, and dumped them...*» One day the woman dared to go to that place and saw in the grass

the body of a thin man with dark hair and traces of cruel torture on his body. «...Obviously he was tortured. I looked out the window at that field and felt guilty because I couldn't do anything or tell anyone about it. I left Kherson, but that man remained lying there...»¹⁰²⁹

After the liberation of Kherson, a local resident spoke about the torture of Ukrainians by the invaders. According to him, the occupiers applied extremely brutal torture. «...They tie you up to a chair. They connect the wires: one to your genitals and the other one to your arm. And they start beating you. Then they throw you on the ground, on the floor. They put a towel over your head and pour water on you. And you suffocate» [...] «...Then they take you to the river and offer to cut off your genitals? To the river because it was probably easier to dump the body there...» he added.¹⁰³⁰

In June 2022, FSB members and other Russian military units broke into the country house of a local resident, where he lived with his family. After searching the house and the surrounding area and threatening to kill his relatives, they apprehended the man and placed him in the seized building of the National Security Service of Ukraine. There he was interrogated, systematically beaten, and tortured with electric shocks to make him collaborate. The victim was held in such conditions for about 10 days.¹⁰³¹

The occupiers subjected children to torture. A 14-year-old boy from the Kherson region passed through the torture chamber of the occupiers.

«There are children's torture chambers in the occupied territories. I thought that the bottom had been reached in Bucha and Irpin. I saw 2 torture chambers in Balakliia, where a boy was held for 90 days, and he was taken out to be shot. There are 10 torture chambers in Kherson. One has a separate cell where children are held,» said Ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets.

The children in the torture chambers were not fed, and water was given to them every other day. They were told that their parents had abandoned them. The boy, whom the occupiers had kept in a torture chamber, said they cut him with a knife, heated a metal piece, and burned parts of his body with it, took him out for execution several times, and shot him over the head. He also testified that he had heard the screams of women and men being tortured around the clock.

Another boy was apprehended by the occupiers for taking pictures of Russian equipment on his phone. The child was imprisoned and tortured. 14-year-old Vitalii, a resident of the village of Kiselivka, was one of those boys who had undergone torture by the occupiers. According to him, he was captured together with his uncle on their way to collect medicine for their aunt from the doctor. The Russian military stopped them, checked his uncle's phone, and found correspondence about the Armed Forces. They took him to a basement (as we later found out, it was the basement of the appeals court in the city of Kherson). There were 13 people there in total. According to the boy, the occupiers played «Russian roulette» there, applied electric shocks to them, and hung them on bars. He saw a man being hanged on a grid who had a heart attack. The man was simply taken down and thrown into a cell. The occupiers took people out into the corridor and beat them there. The boy heard all this... *«where do you hide weapons... how many weapons... with whom did you correspond... why, etc.»* Then they were electrocuted and asked the same questions again.¹⁰³²

On March 30, 2022, the occupiers arrested Serhii Chudynov in the church, a priest with a pro-Ukrainian position who had actively helped defend Kherson. The Russian military searched the church and the house. *«...I was picked up, taken to the police headquarters, and a conversation started. They were interested in something I thought was a joke. They asked me about the war, «the Great Patriotic one,» [World War II]*

and about my attitudes toward veterans. Then: «Are you for peace? I say: «Yes.» They: «And what kind of peace? I go: «I'm not for peace per se, I'm for peace as a result of our victory...» At first, they spoke to me politely for an hour, but then their tone became harsher. They started to «break» me for having talked to SBU employees. Then they ordered: put on a hat. They disorientated me, asked various questions and demanded answers, and then locked me in a cell with no toilet, in a cold cell. They didn't give me anything to drink giving me vodka instead of water. They took all kinds of fingerprints, DNA, and took pictures. Then would return and say more harshly: «You're not going anywhere; we'll send you to Chornobaivka. There's a prison they.» They blindfolded me, did not allow me to recover, and constantly asked incorrectly formulated questions, which were very difficult to answer. Then, they took me from this basement and put a cap over my eyes.» They tied his hands behind his back and led him away saying they were not satisfied with Serhiy's testimony, so they would begin to take him apart, piece by piece. «My eyes were closed. I wanted to drink, I couldn't speak normally, my tongue was dry, and they gave me vodka. Then they said: «You will tell everything yourself because if you stop, we will break you, kill you, and start maiming you.» I had an injury on my left leg, but they hit my knee with a hammer (I didn't see exactly with what) many times - 50, 100 times - hitting my injured meniscus. I couldn't even walk for two days after that. I started having an arrhythmia, and my heart started racing from anxiety. They took a stick and hit the area of my heart. They undressed me, tied my hands behind me, took off my pants, bent me over, put me on my knees, placed my head on a chair and pressed my knee, and grabbed that stick. Then someone came (he spoke with a Caucasian accent), and demanded that I admit to being a member of a sabotage group and having knowledge about subversive groups. I started shouting that I didn't know and that I wouldn't make up such things. They said they would tear open my anus with that stick and stuff it in

there, smearing it with Finalgon. They suffocated me. Long story short, they forced me to agree to cooperate. I did what I could. After that, they allowed me to stand up. I stood there for a long time, having a nervous tic. My leg started to twitch, and I couldn't stop it. Then they let me put on my pants. Imagine that your hands are tied behind your back, and your pants, for example, are lying on the ground, and you have to pick them up. They were rude and insulted me. Then, after they received this consent for cooperation, they asked again: «Do you sincerely wish to collaborate?» I wrote it on a piece of paper. After a few minutes, they allowed me to take off my hat, gave me something to drink, poured me 100 grams of vodka, and brought me something to eat. They gave a pill for arrhythmia and then let me go...»¹⁰³³

On April 21, 2022, during a rally against the occupiers, the Russian military apprehended 29-year-old Arkadii Dovzhenko, a marine biologist from Kherson and an activist who had actively participated in protests against the occupation. «...*That day they threw grenades with tear gas at us. They shot people with real bullets. They shot people in the legs. I saw several wounded guys who had to be evacuated. There was blood on the sidewalk...*» Russian security forces detained Arkadii when he tried to escape from the scene. They blindfolded and handcuffed him and took him to the basement in the police building and later to another room: «*They beat me with batons, fists, and feet. This lasted for several hours... About three hours later, I was taken back to the basement. Then they took me upstairs again. They asked the same questions. Who organized this protest? Who organized other protests? They asked me if I knew anyone from the ATO, the addresses of [other] protesters. They also asked what religion I professed... they said that Ukrainian Orthodox Christians are terrorists and renegades.*»

Arkadii spent seven days there, handcuffed and blindfolded. He was interrogated daily. «*They gave me water, but it*

was very bad... They fed us from their rations. It was almost nothing.» After being released, he could barely walk. «I had a concussion, several broken ribs, and a broken kneecap.»¹⁰³⁴

Another torture chamber of the occupiers was discovered on the territory of detention center in the Kherson region. Ukrainian men and women were constantly tortured there, and terrible screams were heard. After the liberation, traces of torture and the means the occupiers used to torture people were found in almost every room of this building. In particular, Vitalii Serdiuk (the father of a soldier of the Armed Forces of Ukraine), who went through this torture chamber, testified that the occupiers applied electric shocks to his genitals, beat him with rubber batons all over his body, including the lower back, kidneys, etc. They also struck his neck with some objects resulting in welts, and beat his legs with whips. *«Everyone was tortured in different ways, some not severely, being simply thrown into the cell, and others severely. The torture was conducted downstairs. Our room was above it, and terrible screams were heard all day long. Both men and women were tortured. They kept me for one day and took me out to an «interview,» having taken my fingerprints. They broke my arm by pressing it too hard,»* the man recalled. Vitalii said the occupiers were very interested in the whereabouts of his son. *«They put me down with a bag on my head and started striking my lower back and neck. After the beatings, the weal wasn't there anymore. They started beating me on the left side with a whip, including my buttocks, saying: «Think where your son may be.» I said I didn't know; there was no connection. They grabbed me in the summer, when it was hot, so I was wearing shorts and underpants: «Take them off.» Then they connected two electrodes to my genitals, a dynamo machine, 300 volts. My hair stood on end, of course. I screamed, and they said, «Recall.» Then it was less power, but my whole body was trembling. He added power again and said: «Recall.» He added some more and more and hit me with a baton.»* According to Vitalii, the Russian soldiers

would abuse the prisoners especially harshly when they were drunk. *«They were drunk from the morning till the evening. When they got drunk, they walked down the corridor, opened the cells, and wielded sticks. Later, when their Russian Guard came, the regime became softer. For example, they opened the cell, let someone in or gave food. You had to shout, «Glory to Russia, glory to Putin, glory to Shoigu.» Everyone turned to each other, God forbid, you should look at them. You must know the Russian national anthem. It still hangs there on a rag in the cell. If you don't, they will beat you up.»*¹⁰³⁵

Maksym Nehrov was one of those tortured in the Kherson detention center. He was abducted on the night of March 15, 2022, and delivered to a detention center as a former serviceman and participant in hostilities in eastern Ukraine. *«They had lists with which they came to Kherson, and they apprehended almost all the combatants. I was held here for over 3 weeks. They took us there at night, and took away everything they could, including watches, shoes, etc. They threw us into a cell. In the morning, they started drinking, and the same routine continued almost daily...»* Everyone who got there was asked about their interactions with the special services of Ukraine and intelligence agencies and whether they had plans to implement the activities of the Resistance Movement. *«...During March and April, they sometimes let us sleep. No transfers were allowed, no contact with families, friends, etc. I was alone in the cell, no one was allowed in. There was only a bag of quick-dissolving porridge for food, and that was 300 grams of food per day. Later, it was one bag for 2-3 days...»* The man was seated in a chair, with his hands tied and a cap over his head. When the occupiers did not like something, they hit him with an electric shocker in the neck and ears. *«The worst thing was hearing others being tortured 24/7. Terrible screams were heard, which was the most terrible thing for me...»* After drinking alcohol, the occupiers entered the cell, lifted them up, and demanded that everyone shout «Glory to Russia» or sing the Russian national anthem. *«...everyone*

involved with the Armed Forces of Ukraine, law enforcement agencies, activists, journalists, i.e., everyone with a civic position, was brought there. But they were primarily interested in connections with special services and intelligence. Our eyes were free in the cell, but every time we were called for questioning, they bent us over, put over a cap, and put our hands behind our backs. In such a bent position, we were moved around with our eyes closed. I didn't know people who died there due to torture, but I heard the bodies of those murdered being carried out...»¹⁰³⁶

Iryna, a local resident, spent nearly two months in the torture chamber. She was apprehended at her home on July 23, 2022, and placed in the detention center. The woman testified that the women who were detained were also severely tortured, beaten, and forced to confess their cooperation with the Armed Forces.¹⁰³⁷

Mykola Tkachenko, a resident of Kherson, who lived next to the local detention center, where the occupiers had set up the torture chamber, testified that Ukrainians were constantly brought there, tied up, with bags over their heads, and some only wearing underwear. Terrible screams were constantly heard from the premises. There were also women who screamed terribly after being placed in the detention center. He also saw the occupiers carry out the bodies of tortured people in sacks and throw them into the garbage in the outer garage. Another victim in this torture chamber testified that several people committed suicide after being tortured. There were also instances of people being tortured to death by the occupiers. During their time in the detention center, the Ukrainians were forced to shout words of praise for Putin and Russia. They were beaten for shouting not well enough or for looking at the occupiers while doing it. They were also beaten if they did not know the Russian anthem by heart.¹⁰³⁸

Local resident Liudmila Medvedeva also spoke about the horrors of torture on Teploenerhetyky Street. Her house is

located opposite this detention center. The woman saw a lot of equipment there and a lot of people who were brought in handcuffs, with bags over their heads. . «*They were detained, interrogated, and subjected to all kinds of violence: physical and moral. Everyone held on as best as they could...*» The woman recounted how men in their 40s and 50s left the torture chamber, tormented and not knowing their own name. «*They brought them tied, with bags over their heads. They quickly opened the door, brought them in, and I didn't see anything else. I don't know what happened to them. Some came out, and some didn't, but they were terribly tortured...*»¹⁰³⁹

There are many stories about this detention center. People say they heard the screams of those subjected to torture both during the day and at night. They were beaten to death and subjected to inhuman torture. There were also many stories about soldiers brutally beating a person for the «wrong» information in the phone, for the wrong look, or for some words. «*I remember someone saying «orcs,» and the soldiers who heard it beat this person very badly.*»¹⁰⁴⁰



Businessman and volunteer Roman Baklzhov, who delivered food to occupied Kherson, was imprisoned and tortured for 54 days in the detention center on Teploenerhetyky Street.

Trying to break the man's will, the occupiers tortured him with electric shocks, forcing him to call himself a Nazi. In addition to torture, prisoners were forced to learn the Russian national anthem and read pro-Russian books. «...They broke into my house on July 6. There were two FSB officers and, I think, four Russian Guardsmen. They started banging on the gate At half past eight, and I let them in. They began their search, asking: «Where are the weapons?» I said I had no weapons. They showed me a photo from the VKontakte platform with me holding a homemade grenade. I'd already forgotten about it. They said: «Don't pretend to be innocent, we know you're in the loop.» They were looking for evidence of my participation in the «Right Sector.» They found a thank you note from the «RS» to my charitable foundation, and there was also their flag there. They said: «That's it, let's go.» They took me to the car, hit me, and kicked me a couple times. It was their standard procedure. Police officers or guys found with weapons are pressed harder. They are immediately beaten with electric shocks and batons. Since I had no affiliations, and they knew it perfectly well, I was even more or less lightly beaten, purely as a preventive measure. They took me to the detention center on Teploenerhetyky Street. They took off my shoelaces, belt, and chain with a cross. They took me to the cell. When I recovered a little, I looked around and saw everyone had been subjected to beatings. They asked me: «What did they detain you for?» I told them it was because of the «Right Sector.» They said: «That's it, you're toast.» Despite the fact that they themselves were all purple. Then they took me to a preliminary interrogation. There were four of them there. The torture started during the second round. «Wires were attached to my little finger and ear. They said: 'Admit that you are a Nazi!' They electrocuted me (they call it the «Northern Lights»). I thought I started jumping on my chair. Maybe it was true. Sparks flew from the eyes, like in the cartoon «Tom and Jerry.» There were five such shocks.» According to the man, the FSB officers understood perfectly well that Roman was

not a partisan because they had been monitoring Kherson since 2014. *«I realized this when I named a person who had already left, and the FSB officer perked up and said: 'I've been watching him since 2014.'»*

According to Roman, the attitude toward the detainees varied: *«Some detainees were beaten immediately if they did not like them. If they represented the «thug world,» they were beaten and forced to walk while squatting. If they were drug sellers, they were also subjected to severe beating. If they were ATO participants or military members, they were also beaten immediately. Some were forced to crawl into the cell on their stomachs, like spies.»*

At first, people were given portions of oversalted buckwheat porridge and rotten bread with mold, which was impossible to eat. In the evening, they either gave nothing or a glass of boiling water with three tea grounds. Then they started serving pasta, which the man ate for three weeks, washing it down with tap water.¹⁰⁴¹

The occupiers apprehended a local man on April 1, 2022, and initially took him to the detention center in the police department in the Kherson region, where the occupiers had set up torture chambers. The man was later transferred to Simferopol pre-trial detention center No. 1 in Crimea. He was brutally tortured. They ganged up on him, hanged him up with a noose around his neck, simulated execution, threatened to torture his parents, and applied electric shocks (attaching fasteners to his fingers, ears, kidneys, genitals, etc., and applied voltage).¹⁰⁴²

Oleh Baturin, a journalist of an independent newspaper in the Kherson region, who was abducted a few days after the invasion of Russian troops, testified about torture. The occupiers held him on his knees, covered his face, put his hands behind his back, and struck him on his back, ribs, and legs, breaking four ribs. He was also beaten with the rifle butt. «...

They described in detail how they would cut off all my skin with a knife to make me die slowly in agony. They said they'd gouge out my eyes, cut off my ears and my limbs whenever they wanted, and shoot me... The conditions were terrible. It was very cold because the days were very frosty and cold, and more so the nights. A hole in the floor served as a toilet...»¹⁰⁴³

A Kherson doctor said he had seen the legs and arms of patients admitted to the hospital after being detained by the occupiers. One man was beaten with a hose filled with sand. There were instances of burns on the genitals, gunshot wounds to the head of a girl who had been raped, and burns from an iron on the patient's back and stomach. The doctor explained that one of the patients pointed out that during interrogations, the occupiers attached two wires from a car battery to his groin and made him stand on a wet rag. People were threatened that their families would be killed; they were intimidated in every way. According to the victims, they were tortured if they did not want to take the Russian side and because they were at rallies, in the Territorial Defense, or because one of their family members had fought against the separatists. There were many other seriously injured people who were not treated.¹⁰⁴⁴

During the search of a local resident's house, the FSB and Russian Guard officers saw a phone case with the inscription «Who ordered Katia Handziuk?», the banner of the «Right Sector» and a thank-you note from them for volunteering. After that, he was taken to the detention center at Teploenerhetyky Street. His cellmates began asking him for news because they had been in detention for a long time - from 10 to 40 days. *«I looked around, looked at them, and at first it seemed to me that they were not badly beaten. Then my gaze stopped at a man sitting across from me. He had bruises from his eyes down to his mouth. His hands from under the T-shirt were crimson. I looked at another man and saw he had a gunshot wound in the leg. Then I realized that everyone there was*

bruised and beaten...» The first interrogation of this detained man took place the next day after his transfer to the detention center. *«...The first thing they told me was that they had a special person working with people like me. When I returned to the cell and told the guys, they began to gasp and say this was a bad sign. There was a rule: if the Russians didn't like the way you spoke during the previous interview (and this was the case), they*



place an «order» for you to the security, and they tortured you in the corridor in the evening. A friend was forced to drink salt water to cause diarrhea. Another had his hair cut, put it in his pocket, and he was not allowed to take it out. They said they'd finish him if he did. They forced the detainees to eat a Territorial Defense bandage cut into pieces. They beat prisoners with batons, bats, and electric shocks. They could shoot them in the legs or over their heads...» Three days later, the man had a second interrogation, the main one. During it, he was beaten with shocks using the «Northern Lights» button. The occupiers called the man a Nazi, attributed to him membership in the «Right Sector» and a deputy status from a party propagating war. They also asked him if he worked in the SBU, demanding to provide his call sign. According to this victim, there was an ATO participant in front of him during the interrogation, who was beaten until he defecated. He was not allowed to sleep for 4 days, and then they let him go without changing his clothes. After the bruises came off, this man was forced to record a video about his love for Russia. *«One of the cruelest guards was a certain Lyosha. He was a former military, and had served in Syria, being he was an armored personnel carrier driver in this war. His shift started from 11 p.m.*

to 3 a.m., and these were the most terrifying hours. Since the torture took place in the corridor (there was no special room), we in the cells could hear everything that was happening. For the first two days these screams almost split my head open. Once, they brought a guy who they tried to rape with a club. He begged a lot and shouted that he had a wife and a child. There was also a man to whom this was done - they allegedly found a photo of child pornography in his phone and punished him in this way...» The man also testified that 4 to 8 women were constantly held in the detention center. They were beaten less and even taken out for a walk. There were cases when a husband and wife were detained. Then the husband was released and demanded to bring a weapon or tell on someone, while the wife was held hostage.

On August 4, 2022, 16 armed Russian special forces members in uniform broke into the underground bar of Andrii Andriushchenko in the then-occupied residential area of Kherson. They checked his documents, pulled a cap over his eyes, wrapped it up with tape, and began beating him, demanding information about the storage locations of explosives and weapons, which the occupiers believed he had. The enemies did not receive answers to their questions. Therefore, they took the 28-year-old boy to the local pre-trial detention center, where he was held for 73 days and subjected to daily torture. «...Where are the explosives? the Russians asked.» – Andrii said he did not know. They started to torture him. «Where are the weapons?» the occupiers went on asking. He said again that he did not know. Another round of torture began. «Will you cooperate? Will you report on those people?» The boy said again he did not know, and they continued to torture him...» The day after such «interrogations,» Andrii was taken to the pretrial detention center for a lie detector test. But he could not pass it because his physical condition no longer allowed it. Before the start of the full-scale war, Andrii worked as an art director at local nightclubs and as a presenter. After the occupation of the city by the Russians, he

joined the volunteers in the municipal enterprise «Municipal Guard,» maintaining order at rallies and preventing looting. The Russians didn't like it. Therefore, they began to persecute the «guards» a few weeks later. When the Russians detained Andrii in his bar, they did not yet know he was the one who had left inscriptions around the city. The occupiers found this out in just a few days after conducting searches and recovering deleted photos on his phone. The occupiers took Andrii to interrogations every two or three days to extract information. But torture was used every day. «...*They applied electric shocks to various organs. It was a somewhat unusual form of torture,*» Andrii recalled. «*They also knocked out teeth, did not allow people to sleep and eat, and exerted very heavy psychological pressure daily. They were masters in this...*» The man had no connection with the outer world, so the Russians threatened him by saying they would kill his mother and torture his relatives. «...*Psychologically, it was the most difficult part,*» the activist admits. - «*Physically, all days were almost the same. You couldn't get used to the shocks, but I already understood that I wouldn't die from it. It was already perceived as a daily routine. I tried to turn everything into irony the whole time. When I entered the cell, the guys would ask: «Well, how was it?» I'd say: «Well, it was like flying a fighter jet. They attached a wire to my ears, the current was passing through my brain, and I was shaking like due to an overload...*»¹⁰⁴⁵

On March 27, 2022, the occupiers detained 48-year-old Vitalii Lapchuk. On the same day, three cars «Z» written on them pulled over to his family's house. The man told his wife Aliona to hide away the weapon. Lapchuk was subjected to beating: his jaw was all black, broken, and blood vessels were burst in his eyes. His face had streaks on it, being hit with a rifle. The armed men took Vitaly to the basement, where the weapons were stored. His wife heard her husband being beaten. When he was brought out of the basement, she said she saw blood coming from his cheek, and based on her previous experience as a medical professional, assumed he had

a fractured cheekbone. The armed men put bags over the heads of the couple and their son and took them to the police station, where they held them for several hours. All the while, the wife and son could hear her husband being beaten and interrogated in the next room. The Russian military put Aliona and her son in a car and said that Vitali «is a terrorist and will be held accountable according to the law of Russia.» The soldiers threw Aliona and her son under a bridge, and they had to walk home, arriving there at about 4 a.m. On May 22, a man fishing for crayfish found Lapchuk's body in the river. His hands were tied, and a weight was tied to his feet.¹⁰⁴⁶

On May 27, 2022, the Russian military detained a 36-year-old former law enforcement officer after searching his home and discovering his police uniform and his father's hunting rifle. The man's family went to the military commandant's office daily but did not receive information about his whereabouts. «...They told us that ... someone was «working on him...» said his wife. Her husband was released on July 12. The wife did not want to talk about his physical condition, except that there were «signs of physical violence» on him. «You know how they torture people there...»¹⁰⁴⁷

The occupiers tortured Vitalii because his son had participated in the Anti-Terrorist Operation and left for the Ukrainian-controlled territory after the full-scale invasion to defend Ukraine. They came to the man's house and began a search, during which they seized his phone, computer data carriers, and other technical devices. Vitali was placed in a cell and taken for questioning a day later. The main question was, «Where are your son and daughter-in-law..?» The occupiers beat Vitaly very badly, starting from the lower back and further down the legs to the bottom. Vitali said the Russians tortured him with electric shocks. They made him take off his shorts, attached electrodes to his genitals, and turned on the electric current. Then one of the electrodes was attached to

the chest, and torture began again. This continued for an hour and a half.¹⁰⁴⁸

After the liberation of Kherson, the residents said that during the occupation, the Russian military abducted the heads of housing co-ops because they had information about all the residents. According to the townspeople, the torture chambers were located in the buildings of the SBU, the regional state administration, and the police station.



During the interrogations, the invaders used electric shocks and severely beat the men. People also mention instances of rape. A resident of Kherson reported the following: «*The head of our condominium spent 12 days in a torture chamber. A man and a woman. The woman was raped. The man was also raped and tortured with electric current. After that, they were released and cried for three days...*»¹⁰⁴⁹

On the eighth or ninth day of her Russian imprisonment, 26-year-old Olha, a resident of Kherson, was tied to a table and stripped to the waist. For 15 minutes, the interrogator used obscenities to her then threw a jacket over her and let seven more men into the room. According to Olha, «*It was done to scare me...*» According to the report of the representative of the Prosecutor General's Office, «*We find this problem of sexual violence in every place that was occupied by Russia. Every place: the Kyiv, Chernihiv, Kharkiv, and Donetsk regions, as well as here in the Kherson region.*» ...»*We have discovered all kinds of war crimes: rape, forced nudity, and sexual torture inflicted on men, women, and children...*»¹⁰⁵⁰

On July 4, 2022, seven Russian soldiers entered the house where Vasyl was staying with his wife, their young child, and Vasyl's parents. The men were ordered to go outside and the women to go down to the first floor. The soldiers photographed the family members' documents, searched the house, and detained Vasyl. He was placed in the former detention center in Kherson. The occupiers beat him on the legs with a metal rod, injured his shoulder, and used a stun gun on him. The man suffered a concussion. When the Russian military released Vasyl on July 8, they warned him that they would return to check on him in three weeks. The family fled from Kherson, trying to save themselves.¹⁰⁵¹

The Deputy Chairman of the Kherson District Council, S. Troshyna, spoke about the torture chamber in the basements of the receiving and distributing center for children, where the abducted citizens were held in captivity. From 60 to 70 people from Kherson are known to have been kept there. *«...Ukrainian activists and former Ukrainian Armed Forces members and ATO/JFO participants captured by the occupiers are held there. People with injuries and wounds are in very bad conditions. They constantly try to get some kind of testimony out of people. People come out with broken ribs, arms, and legs. This a mini-analogue of the «Isolation» prison in Donetsk...»*¹⁰⁵²

On August 23, 2022, the Russian military detained Olena Naumova, a kindergarten teacher who created patriotic videos on TikTok during the occupation. *«...They searched me, took me to the basement asking many questions. They interrogated me for 4 days. I spent a week there, starving, freezing, and going crazy from all those sounds. Then they forced me to write down an apology to the Russian army for my calls to kill them and the collaborators supporting the Russians here...»* After that, she was taken home, saying that she was no longer needed and that she would be deported to the unoccupied territory of Ukraine. They postponed this «deportation» because concern began to circulate around her

name. They said: «You'll go later.» They delayed it until graves were already being dug up under Izium. They came and said: «You will be leaving soon.» The woman was put under «house arrest.» After that, she hid at her acquaintances' place and avoided all contact until Kherson was liberated by the Armed Forces of Ukraine.¹⁰⁵³

The occupiers detained and tortured Viktoriia, a resident of Kherson. Before the beginning of the full-scale invasion, she was a photographer. Since the beginning of the occupation, she began to photograph enemy equipment, went to all pro-Ukrainian rallies, made all kinds of patriotic (with Ukrainian symbols) ribbons, postcards, etc., and distributed them among people. In the evenings, together with other people, she hung ribbons around the city as a sign of resistance against the occupation. When the Russian military found out about Viktoriia and her «activities,» they came to her home, seized all valuable things, and took her to the basement. There they scattered all the patriotic ribbons and other things with Ukrainian symbols in front of her. The occupiers held Victoria in the basement for 24 days. ...»*During the first interrogation, they didn't beat me much, but then they visited my house and found all the symbols. They said: tomorrow we will show you what hell is, quote «tomorrow you'll be finished,»* the girl recalled. First, she was taken for interrogation and then kept in the basement of the so-called «prison room No. 1.» On the one side, there were other prison rooms and on the other side, there were three rooms where innocent civilians were interrogated and tortured. Viktoriia said Russian soldiers beat her on the head and ribs. They tied her hands and applied electric shocks. It was so painful she once pulled out her own fingernail by clenching her fingers tightly. Viktoriia said that although the Russian soldiers did not try to rape her, they did force her to remove her T-shirt and bra by threatening to electrocute her breasts. Although the soldiers did not carry out the threat, they inflicted constant psychological pressure. The occupiers put up to five people in cramped prison cells, where the prisoners had

to sleep on cardboard. «...I covered myself with a bag that I had to put over my head when someone entered the room. Then I asked for at least one more sheet of cardboard to be put on the floor, and suddenly they gave me a mattress and two blankets. Two blankets for 5 people in the cell.» Every time the soldiers entered the room, people were forced to put garbage bags over their heads and stand against the wall. The cells had a video surveillance system, and no one was allowed to move or speak. However, soon Viktoriia and other people discovered that cameras recorded only movements but not sounds. «Sometimes we sang the Ukrainian national anthem. Very quietly, of course, so as not to be heard in the corridor.» «We were fed in the evening and not every day. They could feed us for four days in a row, and then not feed us for two days. We were given buckwheat porridge. That was it.» Bottles and bags were used instead of toilets.¹⁰⁵⁴

Stanislav and Olha Havryliuk were held in the torture camps of the occupiers in the Kherson region for 76 days. Before the full-scale invasion, this couple lived in the city of Kherson and worked in the local patrol police. Stas is a former ATO participant. On August 4, 2022, the occupiers came to their apartment under the guise of checking passports, introduced themselves as employees of the «Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia,» pointed weapons at them and informed them they were arrested. Olha knows for sure they were betrayed by a former colleague who had changed sides. In the apartment, the occupiers found a weapon (Olha's service weapon was kept at her parents' house). They put Stas on the floor and wrapped his hands behind his back with tape. Then the occupiers called 15 more of their own to the apartment, and began to ask Olha and Stas where the machine gun and grenades were, from which Olha realized that their former colleague had told the occupiers everything. The occupiers, among other things, suspected them of blowing up their «colleagues,» which had happened at the end of July. They were taken to the isolation ward in the police station, where the couple stayed until

September 26, 2022. Then they were taken to the detention center, where they stayed until October 20. Immediately after being transferred to the detention center, they were subjected to interrogations and a polygraph test. The main questions had to do with information about the cache of weapons, participation in anti-occupation rallies, etc. The occupiers tried in every way to talk Olha into cooperating, trying to wear her out. She was held captive for weeks without being visited. At the same time, the occupiers did everything to ensure that she heard other Ukrainians being tortured around the clock. On August 18, Olha was taken for questioning. They put a wet cap over her head, and sat her on a chair, which was also wet. They began asking who her supervisor from the SBU was. When the woman reported she did not have a curator, they began to tape her to a chair, took off her hat, covered her face with a cloth, and poured water on her until she began to suffocate. This continued for a very long time until she managed to tear her hands from the tape. After that, Olha was handcuffed behind her back and thrown to the floor. Russian soldiers held her face and legs and poured water over her. They filmed this torture on the phone, after which the woman was returned to the cell. Stanislav was taken to a polygraph. A few days later he was taken away in the evening by the Russian military to another room. They put his T-shirt on his head, and with the phrase «*you're a bitch, and you're gonna die here,*» they handcuffed him behind his back, put him on a chair and started beating him. Then they threw him on the wet floor and beat him again, including with a stun gun. They poured water on him, to not let him die. They resuscitated him and continued the torture again. It lasted for about two hours. Then the Russian military threatened to bring Olha to look at all that. After that, they said that the next day, they would come with a dental kit and pull out the teeth.¹⁰⁵⁵

The occupiers detained Valeri, who was a local partisan from the beginning of the occupation. Together with his friends, the man damaged Russian military equipment and

cars, filled their fuel tanks with water instead of gasoline, painted Ukrainian flags on buildings, and participated in pro-Ukrainian rallies. On August 24, 2022, the Russian military arrived at his apartment, where he lived with his girlfriend Olia. Olia was the only person who knew about Valerii's activities and also participated in subversive activities. «...*Russian soldiers forced open the door and pinned me down to the floor with a gun to my head. They beat me, blindfolded me, and put me in a car...*» Valerii said. Olia was also apprehended. Valerii was taken to the former Kherson Regional Court building, occupied by the Russian military. It was one of the places used as a prison and torture chamber. He stayed there until mid-September. He was interrogated and beaten. They demanded that he reveal the names and addresses of other people in his organization. But he did not talk. «*They beat me on the ribs and legs, but never on the face, so that there were no obvious signs of torture. They also used electric shocks,*» Valerii recalled. When asked by journalists about instances of people dying after such torture, Valerii answered: «Most likely, yes.» He couldn't see the other victims because, like the other people, his eyes were covered with bags over their heads as they walked through the corridors. But he could clearly hear people crying and screaming during the torture that took place every day. There was a man who had been tortured all day, to whom then a doctor came. Since the doctors came in severe cases, i.e., when someone was badly beaten or something horrible happened, Valerii assumed that the man had been murdered during torture because he could no longer hear his voice. «*All the time I was in the cell, my hand was handcuffed to the radiator. When the soldiers entered the room, we all had to put garbage bags on our heads. We weren't allowed to lie down during the day, only at night. During the day we had to sit or stand. People did not get food regularly, and they only provided technical water for drinking. I used my T-shirt to somehow filter the water because it was muddy.*» In September, Valerii was taken somewhere outside

the city and held in another closed cell. At the end of October, when the Russian military began preparing to withdraw their troops, they released all the prisoners, including Valerii. He was taken to Komyshany (an urban-type settlement in the Kherson region), and he walked from there on foot. His girlfriend Olya had been released earlier, in September.¹⁰⁵⁶

Nakhmet Ismailov was seized in broad daylight from his own apartment in front of his relatives. For more than five hours, he was abused «in the basement» by FSB representatives and the Russian military.*«They sat me on a chair with a bag over my head, beat me, and applied electric shocks. Based on the voices I heard, there were six people there. One beat me, the other gave me electric shocks, and the others asked questions like «Where can we get weapons?», «Where can we get drugs?», «Where is this person?» Each time I said I didn't know, they started beating me over again. The principle was to ask the same questions in different forms after a certain period of time. As far as I understood, if you give the same answers to modified versions of the same question, it means that you're not lying.»*. To increase the pain from electric shocks, the volunteer was additionally doused with water. After the torture, he was released, and all his conversations were bugged for more than two months.¹⁰⁵⁷

Inna Ponomarenko, a resident of Kherson, also underwent brutal torture by the occupiers. The woman was reported on by her neighbors, with whom she had quarreled over the Russian occupation because they had been advocating for Russians in the city. The Russians came to her within an hour and took her «to the basement.» Inna spent a whole month in the torture chamber. She testified that the occupiers put a black bag over her face, tied her head down, and beat her with batons. Then they plugged it in and said: *«B*tch, learn the Russian national anthem and tell on your Ukrainians.»* According to Inna, she was released only because there was no place left unharmed on her body from torture, and she was

barely alive. The woman also said other people died from torture in captivity. They were tortured with electric current and beaten, which they could not survive.¹⁰⁵⁸

Oksana Minenko, a resident of Kherson, went through the occupiers' torture chambers. Her husband, Oleksii, who had served in the Armed Forces, died on February 24, 2022, on the Antonivka Bridge. In the torture chamber, they put a bag over Oksana's head and beat her, pulling out her nails. «...When you have a bag on your head, and you're beaten, a vacuum is formed, and you can't breathe or do anything. You're helpless; you cannot protect yourself. When the nails started to be pulled out, that was one pain mixed with another. I had only one wish asking that my Oleksii «take» me quickly to somehow protect me...»

When showing the occupiers' torture chambers in the Kherson region, a war crimes prosecutor noted that the prisoners slept on old linoleum in the cells, i.e., on bare floor. People were taken for questioning on average once a day. People counted the days in captivity by the number of interrogations. The most common methods of torture were electric shocks, connecting electric wires to the genitals and ears, and dousing people with water. Liudmila Shumkova, a resident of Kherson, testified that the boys in the torture chamber were tortured in a savage way. They screamed terribly during the torture. It was a constant situation, occurring daily, with two or three hours for each prisoner.¹⁰⁵⁹

Andrii, a resident of Kherson, also underwent torture with electric shocks. When the occupiers brought him to the torture chamber and removed the tape from his head, they put him against the wall and undressed him. Then they attached wires to his genitals and switched on the current, while asking questions. Later, the wires were removed from the genitals and attached to his ears, and the torture continued. Recalling those events, the man notes that when the discharges went to his head, he did not understand anything. There was a feeling

that some kind of ball was flying into his head and he passed out from the pain. In order for the current to flow better, the occupiers began to pour water on Andrii. He also had bruises in the form of the letter Z on his back.¹⁰⁶⁰

On someone's tip, the occupiers took Danylo to the torture chamber, thinking he was a Territorial Defense member. He and his brother were brutally abused there from June 27 to July 8, 2022. *«They mainly hit me on the legs, knees, and back. Well, then they took a gun; I heard how the shutter was cocked. They put me on my knee and said: 'We're gonna count to 10. Now you must talk or you'll lose a knee.' What could I say to them? If I'd known something, I probably would have already said it...»* recalled Danylo. In the evening, the boys were tortured by drunk Russian soldiers, who were 20-23 years old. The victims were stripped, and beaten for hours with electric shocks, and cigarettes were extinguished against their bodies. Torture was not only physical but also psychological. *«...They showed us some guy and said he was gay. They said: '...now he will have fun with you here, if you don't cooperate...' They brought contraception and everything for intercourse. Thank God, nothing happened...»* said the man. In addition to beatings and torture, people had restricted access to food and water and were denied medical care. *«On the first day, they didn't feed at all. On the second day, they started giving us food, but... we ate buckwheat once a day, either with canned food with mold or with dry bread with mold. In the evening, we had Russian army galettes. The tea was without sugar, without anything,»* Danylo recalled. The man spoke about the Territorial Defense members, whom the occupiers forced to eat their armbands. In addition, he witnessed the brutal torture of people: *«I'll tell you honestly, I've never heard a person scream like that. I don't know what was done to him, but when I heard that scream, I probably won't ever find any horror movies scary enough anymore... Even animals probably don't scream like that.»* The Russian military put on the Russian national anthem at full volume in

the middle of the night and forced Ukrainians to get up. They also threw alcoholic parties, after which they came to the cells and abused the prisoners for fun. Confessions were knocked out from Kherson residents about what they had never done in trying to coerce them into cooperating with the occupation «authorities.» Those who were not lucky enough to get out were tortured to death, and others were taken to temporarily occupied territories.¹⁰⁶¹

The occupiers accused a 35-year-old activist from Kherson of helping the underground and demanded that he provide his identification data. The man remembers the interrogations with horror: «...*You're electrocuted, and you pass out from electric discharges sent through your earlobes. They let you rest, and then they beat you up with batons or their fists.*»¹⁰⁶²

Those men who spoke Ukrainian were treated with particular cruelty in the seized detention center.

«*A preventive conversation, as they put it. If they heard the Ukrainian language, it was something else... they had print-outs of Stepan Bandera's portrait saying that was Hitler,*» said Serhii Holovko. According to the man, the Russian military threw patriotic people into solitary confinement: «*people got 15 days of solitary confinement. Some got a month. An «educational conversation» including physical injuries took place daily, in the morning and in the evening.*

Yaroslav Sidorov told journalists that the Russians provoked the Ukrainians by shouting, «Glory to Ukraine!» Some of the prisoners automatically answered: «Glory to the heroes!» after which the occupiers took them out of the cell, and they never returned. Serhii Holovko had also transmitted information about the occupiers over the phone. The man had communicated with his relatives and the real, pre-occupation prison management, which the Russians had replaced with theirs. The occupiers spent a month looking for those passing on information to the Ukrainian military. On November 5, 2022, two

Chechens and the regime head came for Yaroslav Sidorov. *«They started beating me... They hit me with something from behind, injuring my head, and I fell down. Oleksandr Kovalchuk (according to Yaroslav, he was the head of the pre-trial detention center regime) stood in front, and the Chechens stood behind. He had a syringe in his hand like the ones you see in the movies - with rings, like «truth serum.» He said: ‘talk, or otherwise...»* Yaroslav recalled. The occupiers took the man with a bag over his head to the industrial zone, put him on his knees in front of a dug pit, and began to extract a confession. *«They removed the bag, and there was a «10 by 10,» maybe dug out for us... He stood above me saying: ‘Come on, tell me.’ And I was like: ‘If I tell, they’ll kill me; if I don’t tell, they’ll kill me all the same. They fired shots above my head, put a bag on, and pulled me back, saying they’d call me again,»* the man recounted.¹⁰⁶³

The Village of Chornobaivka

Oleh Pylypenko, the head of the Shevchenkove amalgamated territorial community in the Mykolaiv region, was captured by the Russian military in March 2022 near Kherson, while transporting humanitarian aid (bread) to the village of Liubomyrivka. The man was held captive by the occupiers for over two months. He and the driver had been ambushed. *«... We were seized, tied up, of course, and brought to their mobile center blindfolded. As soon as it got dark, they sent me to the Chornobaivka airfield to ensure I wouldn’t escape. I was bare-foot. It was March, and it was quite cold. The trip had negative consequences for my feet, not very good...»* *«I don’t want to go into details about what it was like. I think many servicemen who were captured understand that it was no resort. I suffered specific health repercussions. To be honest, I thought we wouldn’t get out of there alive.»* According to the man, at the time, Chornobaivka was the headquarters where all the prisoners captured in the Mykolaiv direction were taken. The

officers interrogated them to determine their «level» for themselves (i.e., filtered them) to decide whom to send to Crimea and then to Russia and whom to continue interrogating. People from the surrounding villages were also held there. It was the civilian population apprehended for various reasons, including for passing on information about the movement of the convoys, etc. «At first, we were in a *basement*. There were two places where people were kept: in a *basement* and in a *pit*. I mean, a *pit* dug out in the yard. There could be a tent on top. There was a huge number of people, and there was no real place to hold them in. Of course, the Russians themselves had problems with food at the beginning of the war, not to mention the prisoners. We got a glass of hot tea and some army galettes. The driver and I were placed in a room two by three meters. There were bunks on which we slept. This room was directly in the headquarters because I was taken to interrogations quite often, especially since two different structures had expressed interest in me. Therefore, we were held in a small room all the time except for the first day. From March 11th to 16th, we were on the territory of this headquarters.» Then the men were taken to Nova Kakhovka to the Operational Command Center covering the area, where many POWs were brought from all directions. «On the positive side, there were no more beatings in Kakhovka. We received a more or less normal treatment, plus they provided me with medical assistance. I was sent to the hospital. Thanks to that, I found out about some of our service members who had been taken prisoners.»¹⁰⁶⁴.

10. **CHERNIHIV REGION**

The Chernihiv Regional Prosecutor's Office reported on the attempted rape of a 15-year-old girl during the occupation of one of the villages in the Chernihiv Region in March 2022. The identity of the Russian military officer involved in this is being established by law enforcement agencies.¹⁰⁶⁵

NIZHYN DISTRICT

The Village of Viktorivka

For more than two weeks, the occupiers held the civilian population of all ages (from the elderly to newborn children) as hostages in the basement without food, water and toilet, in a damp room. The villagers were sent under escort to get a bucket of water. Russian soldiers did not give any medicine even to those whose life depended on certain medicines, resulting in the death of a person with asthma.¹⁰⁶⁶

The Village of Haivoron

On April 1, 2022, the Russian Armed Forces members illegally deprived three local residents of their liberty in the village of Haivoron of the Nizhyn district. They held them in the basement of one of the housing estates for several hours. Then one of the occupants led the men out of the basement. The eldest of them was released, but the other two were taken to the bushes and shot dead with an assault rifle. The victims died of injuries at the scene.¹⁰⁶⁷

The Village of Novy Bykiv

The Russian military set up a real torture chamber in the boiler room of the Novy Bykiv village club, through which at least about 40 people passed. «...*Glass bottles were hit on the prisoners' heads, fires were shot next to them, and they were beaten with rifle butts. One had a weapon put in his mouth and he was told they were going to shoot him...*» One of the prisoners, 21-year-old Maksym Didyk, spoke about the abuse by the Russian military during his 12 days in captivity. The young man was unjustly accused of adjusting the fire for the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The boiler room mostly contained civilian prisoners. Only once did Maksym see three soldiers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine among the prisoners. The Russian overseer forced Maksym to perform various household chores in captivity (his hands were untied and the blindfold was removed). Therefore, Didyk could see what was happening, unlike other prisoners. When the occupiers began to withdraw from the village squeezed out by Ukrainian troops on March 29-30, a Russian military supervising officer began to take the prisoners out of the boiler room to shoot them one by one. «...*Soon I heard shots nearby, and then silence,*» recalled Maksym Didyk . «*After he shot an elderly man, the military supervisor returned to the boiler room and asked me for a rag. There was blood on his feet...*» The Russian soldier also led Maksym out to be shot but spared him. He admitted to executing 4 and releasing 6 prisoners. After the occupation, the bodies of three murdered men were found in the village cemetery, which is literally 100 meters from the boiler house, where the prisoners were kept and from where they were led out to be shot.¹⁰⁶⁸

Five local men were held captive by the Russian military for 33 days. They were taken hostage, starved, kept in the cold, threatened to be shot, and locked in an iron container

at sub-zero temperatures. The victims got frostbite and barely survived. The occupiers justified the detention of the men with their being male Ukrainians.¹⁰⁶⁹

The occupiers also captured three more men and kept them in a metal container on the outskirts of the village in inhumane conditions, freezing weather, without water and food, and without a toilet for several days. One of the men, who worked as a security guard at a local farm, was taped to a chair and declared a spy. «...*They threw us out of the car like kittens, tied our hands, twisted us, shot, and threw us into the car and drove us there. They said I was in intelligence left there to pass on information...*» the man recalled.¹⁰⁷⁰

The Village of Stary Bykiv

On the evening of February 27, 2022, the first day of the occupation of Stary Bykiv, a Russian serviceman shot dead six civilian men apprehended on the village streets. According to witness accounts, it was the occupier's reaction to the city bridge blown up by Ukrainian forces and the minor shelling of their military convoy. The occupiers also seized the son and son-in-law of the local resident named Viktoriia Vovk at their house. The occupiers said they would release the men after questioning, but soon after the woman heard gunshots nearby. The next day, she went with her fellow villagers to the place where the shots had been fired and found the bodies of her relatives near an abandoned building in the village meadow. There were also the bodies of four other fellow villagers shot in the head. The National Police exhumed the bodies of the deceased. The men were also tortured before death. «*They were not only shot in the head but they had also been abused. The son-in-law's carotid artery was cut, and the son's heart was pierced and his ribs were broken...*»¹⁰⁷¹

The Russian military also captured and brutally tortured the local mathematics and computer science teacher, Viktoriia

Andrusha, who was staying at her parents' place in the village of Stary Bykiv during the occupation. She had been passing data regarding the movement of Russian military equipment to the Ukrainian military. On March 25, the Russian military and FSB representatives came to her place and, during the search of her house, found data on her mobile phone, proving she was passing on information to the Ukrainian military, saying «Right, that's her.» She was apprehended and sent to the cellar of one of the houses at the end of the street, and on the next day, transported to the occupiers' headquarters in the village of Novy Bykiv to the boiler room, which already housed many other civilian prisoners and captured Ukrainian servicemen. From there, she was transferred to the Russian territory - first to the village of Glushkovo in the Kursk Region and then to the city of Kursk, where she was held in a pre-trial detention center. There, they used physical violence for anything the prisoners did that was not to the Russian military's liking. For instance, the head was not bent as low as they wanted. The prisoners were constantly forced to sing the Russian anthem and songs. If someone did not know the words, they began to beat them. The occupiers also forced prisoners to do physical work, and if a person could no longer perform it, they were subjected to beating.¹⁰⁷²

CHERNIHIV DISTRICT

The Villages of Andriivka and Pakul

The Russian soldiers led by the 32-year-old commander of the 7th Combined Rifle Company of the Russian Army, Armen Abgaryan, during the occupation of the villages of Andriivka and Pakul, abducted two local residents, kept them in the basement for a day, beat them, and demanded that they provide information about Ukrainian defenders and civilians who

possessed weapons. Armen Abgaryan came down to the basement where the occupiers held the villagers and shot the two men five times in the limbs to coerce them into talking. The victims survived the torture but suffered severe injuries.¹⁰⁷³

The Villages of Vyshneve, Sloboda, and Lukashivka

A group of three Russian soldiers and other occupiers broke into the homes of civilians and, threatening to shoot them demanded information about the location of the personnel and equipment of the Armed Forces. Not receiving an answer, the invaders gave orders to their subordinates to abuse the people and directly participated in it. One of the victims said the occupiers beat him with weapons and metal objects, threatened to kill his wife and son, and then poured flammable liquid on him, threatening to set him on fire. Another victim was held in an unheated room during the cold weather and was also abused and beaten. Russian soldiers kept his elderly mother in the cargo compartment of a truck. Moreover, the invaders seized the man's car, which they used to transport looted local property.¹⁰⁷⁴

The Settlement of Zamhlai

The headman of the Zamhlai District No. 1 in the Chernihiv region, Oleksandr Kraskivskyi, was held captive for a day and a half. The man was subjected to beatings in an attempt to extract information about the location of Armed Forces of Ukraine units deployed in the rear. On March 23, 2022, Oleksandr and his fellow villagers tried to stop heavy machinery at the entrance to the village. He was a «negotiator» for the village community, trying to explain to the occupiers that they should leave. For this, he was apprehended by the Russian military. Oleksandr was placed into a car and forced to the ground. A bag was put over his head, and his eyes were tied with tape. They tied his

hands with plastic and took him to the school in the village of Vyshneve, where the invaders had set up a command post. They interrogated the man. He said the first interrogation was the most terrible because the Russians kicked him in the kidneys, liver, and face and threatened to cut off his fingers and kill him. *«They wanted to know which units of the Armed Forces were behind us. One group left, then another entered. It felt like they controlled each other. I think some were from the FSB, and others from the GRU...»* Oleksandr, who had been in the military in the past, said the interrogation was carried out by professionals because they beat him in such a way as to cause maximum damage but not kill. *«...I still could not figure out why they were hitting my legs. I was sitting, and he was hitting my feet with his boots. I realized this after half an hour when my legs were so swollen that I could neither stand up nor walk. I was motionless...»* After that, he was placed in a small, cold room in the basement, where only some winter garment was on the dirty floor. Later, the occupiers brought another bottle of water, but they had never fed him during the captivity. There was another prisoner in the next room, but Kraskivskyi did not talk to him. During the second interrogation, Oleksandr was beaten on the ears until one of them bled. He was required to write lists of pro-Ukrainian activists. The man noticed that the interrogation room had a rope hanging from the pipes under the ceiling, so he assumed that one of the prisoners could have been hanged there by his hands or feet: *«...I looked at my sneakers and thought: a few more of these interrogations, and it is better to hang myself on the ropes to not give out any information. Released from captivity, I was practically carried in someone's arms. I couldn't walk myself...»* Oleksandr Kraskivskyi was released on March 25. On that day, he was put in a car and taken to representatives of local self-government.¹⁰⁷⁵

The Village of Zolotyinka

The occupiers abducted two men from the village of Zolotyinka for a day and tortured them. The reason for this was the fact that they had a motorcycle, which the Russians alleged they used to transmit the coordinates. The men were stripped and kept tied up in a cellar.

Another evening, the occupiers apprehended the other two men, assuring them that they would be interrogated and released. The woman who followed them was forbidden to do it, and was threatened with being shot in the legs. Later it became clear that the men had been taken to the village of Yahidne and held in the basement of the local school for some time, and then shot. The bodies were discovered in a private yard after the withdrawal of the Russian troops. They bore signs of torture.

Another resident of Zolotyinka was executed by the Russian military. The man had a house and an apiary. When the occupiers came to the village, they kicked him out of the house, but he continued to take care of the apiary. According to the locals, he openly treated the Russians with disdain. He was abducted and also murdered in Yahidne.¹⁰⁷⁶

The Village of Lukashivka

The Russian military abused a family raising three minor children for several days. On March 12, 2022, the occupiers broke into the yard of a private household and hit the owner on the head with a rifle butt and delivered several blows with a pistol handle. They grabbed an ax, threatening to chop off the man's fingers. The occupiers visited this family in the following days, threatened them with physical violence and weapons, ransacked the house, and seized money, a mobile phone, and other things.¹⁰⁷⁷

The Village of Lhiv

In March 2022, a group of Russian soldiers abused local civilians in an occupied settlement of the Chernihiv district. The occupiers settled in the house where a minor girl, her brother, and grandmother were living. A Russian officer and his 12 subordinates lived in this house for three weeks. The unit commander repeatedly raped the 16-year-old girl, using physical and psychological violence. «...*He pushed me into the room and told me to keep quiet. He threw me on the bed, sat on top of me, and started choking me. I screamed. My vision went dark, and I was suffocating. When I could no longer get air, he stopped suffocating me. He said: «If you scream when I am trying to get you, I'll wring your neck. If you do not give up to me voluntarily and scream, I'll kill your grandmother and brother, and everyone will rape you...»* In addition, the invaders beat the girl's brother and kept him in the yard out in the cold several times naked and in handcuffs. The girl's brother Oleksandr said he spent several nights in a row on the street with his hands tied. The Russians found out that the boy had been in the military. Her grandmother tried to protect her granddaughter from harassment with tricks. The woman pretended not to feel well and lay down next to her granddaughter, but the Russian pointed a knife at the grandmother's throat, the girl said.¹⁰⁷⁸

The Settlement of Mykhailo-Kotsiubynske

The Russians tortured a local resident named Oleh Prokhorenko, the father of two children. On March 4, 2022, the man went missing. He went to work and never returned. Oleh's relatives did not know anything about his fate for almost a month. On April 7, the man's body was found in the nearby forest. His body bore signs of severe torture, and his fingers were broken. The Russians killed Oleh before retreating with a shot to the back of the head.¹⁰⁷⁹

The Village of Pakul

In March 2022, during the occupation of the village of Pakul in the Chernihiv district, the commander of one of the units of the Russian Armed Forces entered the basement of the local forestry department, where two village residents were. He fired in their direction from a firearm. The victims received injuries of varying degrees of severity.¹⁰⁸⁰

The Village of Sloboda

The residents of the village lived under occupation for a month and were tortured by the Russian military. 46-year-old Russian soldier Dmitri Makhovsky, a native of the Bryansk region, brutally abused a resident of the village of Sloboda, Mykola Yarosh. Before the occupation, Mykola would drive the mobilized to the enlistment office and had a list of Ukrainian military personnel, which for some reason he left in his bus. The Russians came across the list and apprehended him. They forced the man to climb onto the armored vehicle and took him to the store where, according to Mykola, the dead bodies of the occupiers were lying. It was the day after the day the Russian troops entered the village. The Russians interrogated the man using torture. *«Their commander took a shovel, broke the handle, and beat me with it. He kept on beating me while the others joined him. This was going on in the store. They showed me two corpses and said it was my fault that they died...»* The Russians doused Mykola Yarosh with a solvent: *«Right, the White Spirit.» It was sold in the store... they pointed it directly at me. I was lying down when I was beaten, so he started pouring it on my head saying, «Do you know what it is?» I said: «I do,»* the man recalled. They took Mykola out of the store, threatening to set him on fire with a lighter, and then locked him in a shed. *«... I thought I would never get out of that shed. I never thought it would be possible to survive... It was pure luck because a mine came flying and smashed the*

shed. I was 2 or 3 meters away from it. I have no idea how no debris or bricks did hit me... so I got out of there...»¹⁰⁸¹

The Village of Terekhivka

According to the investigation, a serviceman of military unit No. 14330 of the Armed Forces of Russia, held a wounded civilian captive in an unheated, cold room of a store in the village of Terekhivka between March 13 and 17. The occupant kept the victim tied and with a bag over his head. He did not give him food, water, and the opportunity to fulfill his natural needs. He tortured him by stepping on the man's leg joints, shooting in close proximity to his head, etc.¹⁰⁸²

The Village of Yahidne

During the occupation of the Chernihiv region, the Russian military assembled the villagers and held more than 300 civilians (*as of 04.04.2023, 368 people, including 69 minors, as reported by the prosecutor's office) in the basement of the local school for over a month, occasionally allowing them to go outside. They were not given food, water, or medicines. People were dying of suffocation in the basement. They were forced to sleep in a sitting or standing position because the room was small and there was less than one square meter of space per person. The occupiers explained they were «saving» the villagers in this way. «...We were told we had to go to the basement because the Bandera followers will come, and we must escape from them,» Taisiia Petrivna recalled. «...All the people from the village were taken there: both walking and bedridden. Those who could not walk were also seized. Everyone,» said another resident of Yahidne, Tamara Andriivna. Among the 350 local residents, 77 were children, including 5 infants. The youngest child was one and a half months old, and the oldest hostage was 93 years old. The people held in the basement

were effectively used as human shields since the school premises served as the occupiers' «headquarters.» In the initial days and nights, there was no electricity in the basement, and the prisoners sat in complete darkness. The basement door was opened at 7 a.m., and people were allowed to go to the toilet in the backyard of the school. However, there were days when the door was kept closed, and it was not possible to go to the toilet for several days. «...*We used buckets to go to the toilet. 360 people. Can you imagine that?*» said Tamara Andriivna. People also complained: it was difficult to breathe because of a lack of air. «...*Without oxygen, we fainted. People were dying there,*» said Tamara Andriivna. Finally, the occupiers allowed holes to be made in the walls to let in at least a little air. Before it was evening, the captives were sometimes allowed to go out to the schoolyard to breathe. Sometimes such walks ended in shooting. «...*There were no bunks in there, nothing. We just sat on the sand. We were glad if we could get a piece of cardboard to put at least something under ourselves,*» said Tamara Andriivna. According to the woman, she spent the month in a 5x5 meter room. There were 35 other people with her, including three bedridden and eight children. «...*We would sit during the day. At night, we put our legs on top of each other to stretch them out at least a little. People who were sitting in the corridor and in the common hall (there were many more of them there) generally slept while sitting up and could not stretch their limbs at all...*» said Taisia Petrivna. «*If we didn't listen to them and didn't go back in because we wanted fresh air and because it was hot and we couldn't breathe enough, they immediately started shooting in the air. We suffocated, fell, and ran back to the basement...*» Tamara Andriivna recounted. Inside, people were dying due to terrible conditions. According to the villagers, 11-12 locals died in the basement. «...*These were elderly people in their 70s and 80s who could not endure the lack of air. They had been lively senior citizens on the loose – running around, doing something - they couldn't bear to sit on a chair there day and night...*» Taisiya


Petrivna said. «...*They started to die because there was a lack of oxygen. There was no air to breathe, we were suffocating there. This was not a bomb shelter, but a school basement...*» Tamara Andriivna added. «*Once they brought two boys from Zolotyinka (a village west of Yahidne), they came downstairs to our place but didn't even enter the corridor. 10 minutes later, they were led out, taken behind the fence, shot dead and that was it...*» Taisia Petrivna recalled.¹⁰⁸³

With weapons in their hands, the Russian military forcibly broke into the houses of civilians and randomly fired into the premises where people and children were hiding. These occupiers also took local residents outside in sub-zero temperatures. Threatening to shoot them, they forced them to undress in the presence of women and children. Demonstrating excessive brutality, Russian military personnel used physical violence against the victims for no reason, inflicting beatings with automatic weapons. Furthermore, they illegally deprived local residents of freedom, locking them up for 3 days in the cellar of their own houses. At the same time, they restricted the civilians' access to water, food, and fresh air.¹⁰⁸⁴

A known case also involves a situation where, after tormenting a family (torture and inflicting significant emotional suffering), its members were placed in the basement of a school, where the local population was being held as a «human shield.»¹⁰⁸⁵

The occupiers tortured and killed a local resident, Viktor Shevchenko. «*He was killed by the Russians with a shot to the head and buried in his own garden near his house. This happened during a period when everyone was being herded into the school basement. According to local residents, he was killed because he had a firearm at home—a hunting rifle. He also often wore a camouflage coat, and it's possible he was wearing it at the moment when the occupiers saw him,*» said a volunteer from Kyiv.¹⁰⁸⁶

Bazan, a 40-year-old Russian soldier from the Republic of Tuva, abused the locals during the occupation of the village of Yahidne. He was also one of those who terrorized local residents by holding more than 300 people in the school basement. This Andriyan Bazan took one of the residents of Yahidne onto the street, put him against the wall, and started shooting over the man's head, threatening to kill him if he did not tell something about the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Despite the Yahidne resident not knowing anything about the Ukrainian defenders, the Russian soldier continued to torture him. The occupier took out a dummy grenade and threw it at the prisoner's feet. The occupier was greatly amused when the man got scared, fell down, and tried to cover his head with his hands in an attempt to protect himself. Such 'entertainment' appeared clever to the Russian soldier, who laughed loudly at the frightened civilian before locking him in the basement of the school.»¹⁰⁸⁷.

A photograph showing a person in a dark jacket and blue pants walking away from the camera, pushing a bicycle. The person is on a dirt and debris-covered street. To the right, a green car is severely damaged, with its rear end crushed and the body panels missing. The background shows bare trees and utility poles under an overcast sky. A semi-transparent white box with black text is overlaid in the center of the image.

**Attachment.
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